

## DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

### **Disability, the dancer and the dance with specific reference to three choreographers Caroline Bowditch, Marc Brew and Claire Cunningham**

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**Disability, the Dancer and the Dance with Specific  
Reference to Three Choreographers:**

**Caroline Bowditch, Marc Brew and Claire  
Cunningham**

**By**

**Gillian Williams**

**September 2014**



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***A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the University's requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy***

## **Dedication**

**Remembering the Life of Jimmy.**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis offers critical exploration of the intersection of four elements within the historical space, or field, of UK theatre dance between 2007 and 2012: disability, impairment, dance and artistry.

It addresses four questions: What is disability? What is disability in relation to dance? What supports the entry of a disabled dance artist into the field of professional dance in the twenty-first century? How can we approach a critical analysis of the works they create?

At the centre of the thesis are case studies of three self-described disabled dance artists, performers and choreographers: Caroline Bowditch, Marc Brew, and Claire Cunningham. The studies attend to the form and content of their creative work, the structures of the dance field in which they practice as artists, and their personal and career trajectories.

The studies are both situated by and situate earlier chapters addressing constructions of disability, cultural representations of disability and the emerging field of Disability Arts. They demonstrate that disability, in dance as in other fields, concerns attitudes, arrangements and structures that disable participation. These are attitudes fed by imaginings around the ideal dancing body, and the illusion that variations in bodily form and capabilities are neither normal nor to be expected.

I draw on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field to consider the interconnections between structures, external and internalised, that support or limit the disabled artist's perception of what is possible for them within the professional dance field.

Using Cameron's affirmative model of disability, I argue that when disabled dance artists are freed to use their experiences of living in a disabling world, and to make use of the unique capabilities of their bodies as valid sources for their art, they can and do contribute to the capacity of dance as an art form to explore the full depth and range of human experience.

# 1 An Introduction

This thesis addresses the subject matter of the self-described disabled dance artist and the dance work they create. The presence of professional disabled artists as both performers and choreographers is a relatively recent phenomenon on the British concert stage. This poses a range of questions for dance scholarship. A non-disabled choreographer may come to be interested in the range of movement possibilities offered by a disabled performer. What processes may be possible where the choreographers define themselves as disabled? If the artistry and the disability are entwined in a single performance, how is it possible to appraise the work critically?

What does 'disabled' mean? What does 'disability' mean in the context of dance? What relationship might there be between changes in social and cultural perceptions of disability and legislation that seeks to support full civic rights for people with disabilities and the opportunities for disabled people? How might this in turn raise particular questions in dance, where the body and its capacity to communicate are central to the art form? Where the artist has a visibly atypical body, what is different in the performances and the works they create as compared with that of non-disabled 'typical' dancers? Is there any?

The study engages with questions of imagination and reality in relation to the professional world of creative dance performance in the UK between 2007 and 2012. It also engages with the size and nature of the presence of disabled dance artists within that world.

Dance in all its forms offers a range of possibilities. It may represent enjoyable social participation in community dance classes, an entertaining escape from daily life as an audience member for a West End Show or a form of sporting competition for spectator and participant in ballroom or disco dancing.

It may represent a connection with a cultural heritage, in Scottish folk dance or Bhara Natyam, or have a ritual or religious significance as in the shared dance that is part of Christian or Sufi forms of worship. It may offer the possibilities of both participation and spectatorship in a competitive sport,

such as competitive ballroom and disco dancing or a field of employment for performers, choreographers, administrators and teachers.

Central to this thesis are three focused studies of three dance artists, Caroline Bowditch, Marc Brew and Claire Cunningham, their pathways into dance during the years 2007-2012 and their choreographic work. The thesis examines how a consideration of their pathways into the profession and their choreographic work extends our knowledge about the contributions made to the dance sector by artists with impairments.

## **1.1 A Personal Note**

Like many researchers this research started from individual interests and dispositions. These have, in turn, been shaped by my own biography and a realisation that the resultant attitudes and experiences must colour my perceptions. On reflection, I can see how my interests in disabled dance artists arise partly through my earlier experiences as child and adult and the fields in which these were shaped and given meaning. I grew up in a family in Glasgow where, for several members, major impairments had shaped their bodies and some of the opportunities open to them. As a student and throughout my life I have developed close friendships with a number of people who lived with major impairments, physical, cognitive and sensory.

My own experience of dance, as a form to learn and not only as an activity to enjoy came relatively late in my life. A period living in Ibadan, Nigeria introduced me to a world in which dance is an everyday activity and as part of important rituals, marriage, funerals, and chieftaincy installations is one aspect of living in community with others. In Britain, first my daughter and son, and then I myself, began to dance in youth and community dance classes with Cecilia Macfarlane, an artist and teacher, whose practice was influenced by the ideas of the New Dance movement in the UK.

From the beginning these classes and performance groups involved people with a wide range of abilities, physical and cognitive, and range of ages. Some dancers had trained in specific dance techniques to a professional

level; some like me had experience in acting and theatre skills. What we all shared was a passion for dance and for creating, from the expressive possibilities of our bodies, and our life experiences, performance to share with others.

I enrolled in a full time dance degree at Coventry University. At sixty, as an undergraduate on a dance course, I was well aware of the differences in my own aging body and its capacities compared with my fellow students, all at least forty years younger and with considerably more technical training in dance than me.

On the other hand I had knowledge, and skills of relevance to an academic course, writing, time and project management, and appreciation of dance works that stemmed directly from my working life and earlier training in theatre. My bodily capabilities were different from when I was the same age as my fellow students but I also had experiences of learning other dance forms in Nigeria and in the Scotland of my youth. I also benefitted directly from changes in pedagogical methods instituted on the course to make it accessible to the small number of disabled students who had and were studying dance at the university.

During my studies at Coventry, I became increasingly interested in the work of dance artists with disabilities I found that while there was some critical writing that engaged with the meaning and nature of the performances by disabled artists the assumption in the literature seemed to be that both audience and choreographer were non-disabled. It appeared to me that any discussion of the visible presence of something termed *disability* in the body of the performers and their work was being analysed in terms of normative ideals and standards pertaining to so-called normal bodies rather than from a perspective shaped and formed from experiences related to non-normate bodies.

## 1.2 Methodological Approaches.

My original intention for this thesis was a study of the training, and artistic and professional development of the self-described disabled students who had studied at Coventry. My preliminary research was informed by grounded theory approaches to research<sup>1</sup>. Alan Bryman, an expert in the field of social research methods, in his guide to researchers distinguishes two aspects of grounded theory: the tools available and the outcomes of the approach (Bryman 2008:542-544).

The tools he identifies include theoretical sampling, coding of data acquired and constant comparison to maintain a close connection between data collection and conceptualisation. The outcomes he notes build first on discrete concepts emerging from codifying data, developed in turn to form core categories with distinctive properties. In a grounded theory approach hypotheses about potential links between these categories are then used to develop a theoretical framework to address the emergence of 'some relevant social or other phenomenon' (Bryman 2008:544).

I initiated informal conversations with students past and present at Coventry, attended open debates within the dance sector in the UK facilitated by Candoco Dance Company, and began to attend workshops with companies including Candoco and Blue Eyed Soul Dance Company. My aim was to gain first hand experiences of accessible methods in dance education, and to develop my own skills in facilitating accessible dance workshops. I had intended to explore and to contrast the effectiveness of different pedagogical methods in the training of disabled and non-disabled dance students.

What emerged, particularly from the discussion with students were two main themes. The first was a concern to develop adaptation or translation of existing dance techniques to suit the individual physicality of each student described variously as 'my translation' or 'my adaptation' rather than focus on new and interesting ways of using their dancing bodies that drew on the

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<sup>1</sup> For a good overview of the complexities and development of grounded theory approach to qualitative data see Bryman 2008 and in particular chapter 22

unique capacities of their individual bodies. The second was the relative paucity of material, archival film, academic writing concerning disabled dancers compared with resources relating to non-disabled dance artists. My preliminary review of the dance literature relating to disabled dance artists also suggested that much of what was written involved disabled artists performing work created by non-disabled choreographers. In other words it focused on how non-disabled choreographers, and scholars, explored ways to work with disabled dancers, the perceptions of the non-disabled artist rather than those of the disabled artist.

### **1.3 Finding a Focus**

During my preliminary investigations I became aware of the work of Caroline Bowditch, Marc Brew and Claire Cunningham the three artists whose performance, development and training is the central focus of the three chapters in section two of this thesis. They share a number of characteristics. They were all born in the 1970s, Bowditch and Brew in Australia and Cunningham in Scotland.

All three entered the professional dance field in the UK in the first decade of the twenty first century and by 2012 all were living in Scotland. As members of a particular age cohort they were potential beneficiaries of the pioneering work of a previous generation of disabled performance artists and companies during the late twentieth century<sup>2</sup>.

All three had visibly non-normate bodies to which others ascribed a disabled identity but all three had come to claim for themselves an identity as a disabled dance artist. Bowditch and Cunningham were born with conditions that impacted on the form and functioning of their bodies as they grew up. Brew's early training shaped his bodily structure as a dancer. As a young adult he acquired injuries to his body as the result of a car crash that visibly transformed his bodily form. All three incorporated their mobility aids,

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<sup>2</sup> See Benjamin2010: 111 for a useful list of companies and disabled dance artists in Europe, UK and the US.

Cunningham's crutches and the wheelchairs of Bowditch and Brew, into their dance performances.

Each artist had a different pathway into their work and development as both performers and as choreographers. They shared the experience that each had physical impairments that meant that its impact on their bodies was visible to others leading to ascription of a disabled identity. Each in different ways had come to reflect upon what it meant to assume identities as both artist and disabled artist and the extent to which this played a part in developing their unique pathways, creative interests and work as choreographers.

All accumulated cultural capital in training in a field of performing art. For Bowditch the fields were music and theatre, for Brew primarily different forms of dance and Cunningham music, in particular, singing. Between 2007 and 2012 each came to establish positions as choreographers with national and increasingly international reputations as well as occupying the position of important leaders in the field of dance and disability.

They were also involved in the development of their careers in the UK between 2007-2012. This was a period that marked by shifting attitudes towards the place of disabled citizens and their rights to participate fully in society, incorporated in legislative changes both in their countries of origin and the UK. Bowditch, Brew and Cunningham were part of a very small group of disabled choreographers working over this period either in the UK or worldwide.

By considering artists who come to create distinctive and individual artistic practices during the same historical period it becomes possible to consider both the nature of the contemporary dance field with which they were engaged and the barriers and the possibilities it afforded them as disabled artists.



A number of performance companies that engaged the work of disabled artists had been established in the twentieth century<sup>3</sup>. These were artists with physical, cognitive and sensory impairments. In UK theatre this included Graeae (1980) and Common Ground Sign Theatre (1985) as well as professional dance companies, Green Candle Company (1987) and Magpie Dance (1986), a company offering dance performance opportunities for dancers with learning disabilities.

One of the first disabled artists to establish a position as both choreographer and artistic director was Manri Kim who created her Butoh-based Performance Company Taihen in Osaka, Japan in 1983.

In the UK Céleste Dandeker, a dancer who returned to dance after a major accident, co-founded with Adam Benjamin Candoco Dance Company in 2000. She remained the artistic director of the company until her retirement in 2007. What was distinctive was not only the incorporation of disabled and non-disabled dancers but also the avowed aim of the company to seek audiences in mainstream dance with work of a high technical competence in terms set by the mainstream dance field.

Mainstream in this sense meant venues featuring the work of professional dance companies attracting a wide-ranging audience for dance. It was contrasted with a more specialist area of disability performance aimed largely at an audience of disabled people and their allies. Dandeker commissioned work from a range of choreographers, with international reputations, who created thirty different dance works for the company before she retired.

This research focuses on how disabled choreographers can find both training and establish their work as professionals in the dance field. It is also concerned to examine how shifts in the professional field of theatre dance contribute not just to opportunities for disabled artists to develop their practices as choreographers. It is also concerned both how these shifts are

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix1 delineates a time line of the establishment of companies in relation to key dates in the development of social policies in relation to disabled people.

reflected in the work they create and raises questions about how to approach analysis of their work.

## **1.4 Three Situated Case Studies**

Central to the thesis are three extended case studies of the personal trajectories of Bowditch, Brew and Cunningham and their works created between 2007 and 2012. This allows for examination of the work and career of each artist within the historical context of dance sector in the UK in the early twenty first century that had previously effectively excluded participation by disabled artists.

The studies are designed to reveal new understandings about the relationship between the individual choices made by artists and the working world within which they are located. The studies employ a multi-stranded model for the analysis and appreciation of dance made and performed by dance artists with disabilities. Each study combines attention to individual histories, analysis of performances works, and examination of the individual practices and ideas of each selected artist.

This methodological approach seeks to illuminate not only the nature of these developing practices for each artist but also to consider how these developments intersected with shifts in the dance sector, and the wider culture in the UK during of the period covered. The approach is concerned not only to contextualise the three case studies but to examine that context through consideration of the three pathways and creative work of three unique and distinctive artists. The studies are, in this sense, situated case studies.

The sociologist J. Clyde Mitchell (1918 -1985) discusses the role and value of the case study as a method of inquiry in anthropology and sociology. He suggest that it can function as both as a source for examining the particular, whether individual life or group, and a basis for reflection upon the general, the wider social world in which the individual or group is situated.

In his 1983 paper reprinted in 2006 Mitchell argues for the value of the situated case study. Mitchell distinguishes between case material used as ‘apt

illustration', which has its place, and the conducting of an extended case study that 'enables the analyst to trace how events chain to another and how therefore events are necessarily linked through time' (2006:39).

For Mitchell, what is it at stake is not the typicality of the particular instance that is investigated but an understanding of each particular study. He makes it clear that both the case study and the use to which it will be put needs to be situated within 'the whole corpus of related knowledge' (Mitchell: 2006:39) in order to draw any conclusions. The central case studies of the three artists in this thesis represent such extended studies and seek to situate the individual case studies within a wider corpus of knowledge around dance, disability, impairment and artistry. Corpus of knowledge in this sense includes the political social and economic worlds in which the artists engage as social actors.

Consideration of the work and development of each artist is located during the period 2007-2012 when they were establishing and developing careers as performers and as choreographers in the UK. The studies are therefore situated within a specific time period, within a particular art form and culture, the professional dance sector in the UK.

A range of sources has been consulted to support the development of the case studies. These sources include empirical and theoretical research in the fields of Disability Studies and Dance Studies. Additional source materials include biographical information provided by the artists in conversations with myself, in more formal interview settings and more informal settings. These discussions have included situations where we have participated together in public events, symposia and workshops that have taken place between 2009 and 2013.

This material has been supplemented by examination of biographical information placed in the public domain by the artists, in written form in articles, website and promotional material, or cited in interviews granted to journalists, as well as material presented by the artists as speeches or papers in public events. A final strand of the methodology has been the viewing of the

work that the three artists have made between 2007 and 2012<sup>4</sup>. A detailed analysis of selected works is developed, supported by other accounts of the work by critics and which are placed in the public domain.

## 1.5 Biographical Elements

A useful way of approaching the use of biographical material in different areas for research is offered in the work of two German researchers Wolfram Fischer-Rosenthal and Gabriele Rosenthal<sup>5</sup> that has proved a useful tool for interdisciplinary research in Migration studies (Apitzsch et al 1997). Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal (1997) refer to biography as a 'social creation/construction' that:

constitutes both social reality and the subjects' worlds of knowledge and experience, and which is constantly affirmed and transformed within the dialectical relationship between life history, knowledge and experiences and patterns presented by society'. - Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal 1997: 138 cited in Apitzsch et al 2007:5

Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal's approach to personal construction to encompass relationships between, life history, and opportunities presented by society and experiences can be seen as germane to this thesis. They do not, however, offer an adequate model to allow inclusion of the work of each artist as part of that process of construction and this study's aim is not simply the construction of biographies.

What the French sociologist, anthropologist, and, philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) offers in his *Sketch for a Self Analysis* (2007) is a method of inquiry that seeks to analyse links between individual biography, intellectual interests and dispositions and career pathway. Bourdieu applies this method in a self-analysis where he undertakes what he terms 'a sociological analysis excluding psychology, except for some moods' (2007:ix).

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<sup>4</sup> These viewing include live performances and archival film of the work.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of multi disciplinary approaches to biographical research see Apitzsch et al 2007

He explicitly rejects any sense of the process as one that aims to present an autobiographical narrative although he does make use of incidents from his own life. Bourdieu interweaves this material with reflection, both on the academic structures or fields within which he developed a long and distinguished career, and how these may have impacted on his ideas, and creative writing.

What Bourdieu provides is a reflexive process, that can extend not just to the autobiographical but also the biographical, where the very nature of both ideas and work created by the artists can be open to scrutiny. It allows questions to be raised concerning the relationship between individual agency and imagination, and the social structures of the world in which these are formed. Like Mitchell, Bourdieu posits the need for engagement with the actions of the individual and the particular, as well as the wider structures in which these are played out, and also the interplay between the two.

Bourdieu's use of the terms *habitus* and *field* to delineate elements of agency and structure runs throughout his writings<sup>6</sup>. They are concepts of particularly value for this thesis and are discussed in more detail in chapter two. They offer tools for consideration both of the positioning of disabled artists and their efforts to position themselves within the dance field and the impact of social structures upon the ideas and practices and strategies of the individual artist.

In his 2007 work, what Bourdieu offers is a method of inquiry where there is room to consider aspects of personal biographies as they are remembered and identified by an individual. It is a method of inquiry that allows, for example, consideration to be given to what aspects of biography are presented in an a particular artistic work but also what impact these histories may have on the perceptions and ideas of viewers of the work.

Writing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the literary scholar Thomas Couser (1997; 2005) points to the important contribution made to contemporary discourses around disability by an ever-growing literature of life writing by disabled people. These accounts can be seen to function as

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<sup>6</sup> For a good overview of the development of these concepts see Wacquant 1998.

counter-narratives to what the US jurist and disability activist Jacobus tenBroek refers to as the 'erroneous and misguided' public attitudes towards disabled people (1966:842). They also deepen and widen our understanding of how disabled people can and do engage in social political and cultural fields.

Couser also notes that 'deviations from bodily norms often provoke a demand for explanatory narratives in everyday life' (2006: 400). This demand is placed on individuals but what the life writing, and indeed the work of disabled scholars, political activists and artists, represents is the exercise of both the choice of what matters to place in the public domain and a deepening and widening of our understanding of the work and positioning of disabled people in a wide range of fields.

My aim in this study is to ensure that the choice of which aspects of experience were revealed in conversations with the artist, and or revealed to other interviewers to be placed in the public domain, remain with the artist. For the case studies I have therefore chosen not to use other secondary sources of information through interviewing colleagues, mentors or associates of the artists to gather this material. I have, however, included analyses of their work that critics and colleagues have placed in the public domain in newspapers, online journals and academic publications.

The material I have collected includes that obtained through observation and discussion of the artists' ideas concerning dance and disabled identity in a series of open debates and symposia. This has allowed consideration of how they have explored and developed these ideas in the company of other disabled artists and in the context of a UK dance and disability sector.

## 1.6 The Structure of the Thesis

The Thesis is divided into two sections that largely represent Mitchell's division into exploration of a general corpus of knowledge and extended case studies.

Chapters two to five address a series of topics in relation to disability, the arts and dance in particular. They draw, wherever possible, on the contributions to knowledge provided by disabled people, as scholars within different disciplines within the academy, as, activists within social and political fields and as artists and art critics. Each incorporates the use of examples functioning as the ' apt illustrations' designated by Mitchell, in order to further understanding of the knowledge presented.

Chapters three to eight are each devoted to case studies addressing the individual trajectories the biography and work of a single artist, Caroline Bowditch, Marc Brew and Claire Cunningham.

Chapter two addresses changing conceptions of disability and impairment and their relationship to inequalities in the life chances of disabled people within social cultural and political spheres.

Chapter three looks at the shifting nature of cultural representations of disability. It moves to consideration of spectatorship and disabled people, both in the everyday and within the performing arts. It ends by considering how these cultural and social phenomena may intersect with questions of personal identity for a disabled individual and artist.

Chapter four moves from consideration of cultural representations of disability to examine what happens when deaf and disabled artists enter artistic fields. The chapter situates the debates within a history of public spectacles in which disabled people have appeared and within the emergence of an avowedly political, field of Disability Arts.

The chapter progresses to consider the place of political motives within an artistic field using examples taken from debates within US dance field in the 1930s.

Chapter five looks specifically at the UK dance sector in the twentieth century. The main focus is the arena of professional theatre dance and the impact of anti-discriminatory legislation and social changes that aimed to improve the life chances for disabled people particularly in areas of training and career development. It ends by considering contradictory cultural and social representations of disabled people that ran alongside two international events held in London in the summer of 2012: the Paralympics, where Paralympic athletes were competing, and *Unlimited*, a festival of work commissioned from deaf and disabled artists.

These four chapters are used to situate the three separate case studies provided in chapters six to eight with a chapter devoted to each artist. Each study attends to the biography of the artists their training and career development within dance and choreographic work performed between 2007 and 2012.

The differing level of attention given to each element within the three studies reflects what can be learned from the individuality and the originality of the work they each created. The levels of attention also attend to but also what can be learned from different artists who are at different points in their career trajectories and have different experiences linked to their individual physical impairments.



## 2 Approaching Disability and Impairment

Human beings share the reality that their lives are finite and their bodies are vulnerable. The wide range of diversities in appearance and functioning of cognitive, sensory and other physical aspects in all humans will alter across an individual lifespan.<sup>7</sup> As the US disability studies scholar Lennard J. Davis points out (1995:8) a relatively small proportion of people are born, with physical, cognitive, or sensory impairments.

The vast majority of them will acquire such impairments of functioning through illness, injuries sustained at home or work, during times of war as soldiers or as civilians during peacetime, or through changes in their bodies as they age (Davis 1995:8). The relative presence or absence of such impairments can have major consequences for people's positions and life chances within twenty first century societies.

A statistical overview available on the website of the UK government's Office for Disability Issues (ODI 2011) shows over eleven million people in the UK living with 'a limiting long term illness, impairment or disability' out of a population of 63.4 million. The ODI site begins by using three different categories; long-term illness, impairment, and disability but ends by conflating them in one category 'disabled'. Disabled in this sense is used as a descriptor to distinguish one group of people, disabled people, from another, non-disabled people.

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<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed discussion drawing on statistical evidence presented in the USA see Davis (2002)

The ODI analysis reveals distinct differences in the living standards and life chances of this group of people in relation to the total population. Their standards of living are significantly lower. Fewer of them are in work with 46 per cent of working-age disabled people in employment compared to 76 per cent of working-age non-disabled people.

Disabled people are only a third as likely to hold any qualifications compared to non-disabled people. For those in employment, disabled people are significantly more likely to experience unfair treatment at work than non-disabled people, and to encounter difficulties related to their impairment in accessing public and commercial goods, and leisure and cultural pursuits (ODI 2011)<sup>8</sup>.

In the UK and throughout the western world the last forty years have involved social, political, legislative and technological changes contributing to the increased visibility and participation of people of all abilities within public life and within the arts (Barnes and Mercer 2003; Benjamin 2002; Sandahl and Auslander 2005; Swain et al 2004; Wilkinson 2009).

The active participation of people with disabilities in the political, social and academic arenas at national and international levels has involved disabled scholars, artists, and activists in processes that challenge the meaning and use in practice of the concepts of 'disability', 'impairment' and 'disabled'. This activity has also led to the emergence of a new field of study in the academy, critical disability studies.

This chapter begins by engaging with the inherently unstable and contestable nature of concepts of disability, and impairment. It does so first by considering how, in the light of the kinds of inequalities emerging in the ODI figures, disability scholars and disabled activists have sought to establish a descriptive but non-discriminatory language in which debates may be conducted. This is followed by a discussion of the need to consider conceptions of disability and

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<sup>8</sup> For an introduction to current debates on ways to define categories and collect data for the purpose of constructing public policy around disability and inclusion see Bury 2000; Barnes and Oliver 2012

indeed dance itself in the contexts in which the concepts are used and practiced and their relevance to the work and career of individual artists.

The main example chosen is that of a distinction between conceptions of disability and impairment central to the emergence of a social model that has played a prominent part in the emergence of disability studies in the UK. A recent performance work by the disability scholar and artist Liz Crow is used to consider the nature of the social model in relation to the artist's use of personal experience in creating artwork.

## 2.1 Naming Disability

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines the term 'disabled' as applied to a person 'having a physical or mental condition, which limits activity, movement, sensation etc.' (OED 2013) and identifies its current use to describe 'a class of persons'. The OED dates its entry into common usage:

The word *disabled* came to be used as the standard term in this sense in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it remains the most generally accepted term in both American and British English today. It superseded outmoded, and now frequently offensive, terms such as *crippled* *handicapped*, etc. - OED 2013

The changing usage of words and terms in private and public spheres can be seen as linked to a desire to address people in ways that are respectful in practice. They are often chosen and employed as a matter of social etiquette, politeness and engagement with individual cultural and personal preferences<sup>9</sup> as well as to indicate different approaches to practices. The established usage of the terms 'disabled person' (UK) and 'person with disabilities' (US) has been adopted by most writers in Disability Studies and will be used

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<sup>9</sup> See Tomasic and Verdi-Fletcher 2012: 7-8 for a useful discussion of questions of language and terminology in inclusive dance pedagogy in the USA.

throughout this thesis. Terms used in this thesis will also change in response to the form preferred by the individual artist or scholar being discussed.<sup>10</sup>

A growing range of terms can be identified in the dance world. Jess Curtis, a west coast dancer refers to himself with the US term TAB (temporarily able – bodied person). Dancers distinguish between disabled and non-disabled dancers, the mode of movement such as foot based and wheel based dancers (Common Wheels) or use terms such as non-normate to describe their bodies.

Companies employing disabled artists together with non-disabled dancers are described variously as inclusive, integrated or mixed ability companies. The terms disability company or disability led company can also indicate that disabled people hold the important positions within the company as performers, directors and choreographers.

In the UK, the psychotherapist Valerie Sinanson (1992:40) and the psychologist Deborah Marks (1999: Chapter 7) attest to the value of attentiveness to the exploration of language in the context of disability. They do, however, suggest that the search for appropriate terminology by non-disabled people can also function as a defence against examining the fears of impairment or survivor guilt that are evoked by an encounter with a disabled person.

It may be said that a search for euphemisms avoids the realities of limitations stemming both from specific impairments and forms of prejudice and discrimination that place one party in a privileged position in relation to the other. For the non-disabled speaker it avoids the reality that to be human is to be both imperfect and vulnerable and protects against experiencing the powerful feelings and anxieties that accompany this uncomfortable reality.

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<sup>10</sup> For example some people with hearing impairments prefer to distinguish themselves as members of a minority group with a common language and community based on use of different versions of Sign and use the term Deaf while others retain the term deaf.

One area of focus in Disability Studies and by disabled activists has been a robust challenge to the use of words seen as derogatory, infantilising, and demeaning. This attention to the use of language parallels interventions made by black, feminist and gay activists and scholars to shift the words and terms used to describe men or women of colour and divergent sexual orientation (Davis 2002, Morris 1991, Linton 1998). The US psychologist and disability scholar Simi Linton makes clear that this is not simply a process of substituting 'nice' and inoffensive words for 'nasty ones' (1998:16).

When groups continue to describe themselves as disabled or people with disabilities, Linton argues that these terms are being used to identify a group of people 'bound by common social and political experience' (Linton 1998:12). For Linton what is happening is a strategic 'reassignment of the meaning' of the term disabled (1998:11) away from a medicalised usage that implies that it is the individual and their condition that require treatment (1998:11). In its new meaning the disability that requires attention and treatment is that connected with 'social processes and policies that constrict disabled people's lives' (Linton 1998:11).

The social psychologist and disability scholar Dan Goodley (2010:7-10) notes particular usages within British Disability Studies of the terms disability, disablism and disablement. Disability is an act of social exclusion and a phenomenon of cultural, social and economic conditions (2010:9). Disablism is a form of social oppression imposing social, psychological and structural limitations on the activities of people with impairments. It involves a process of undermining wellbeing and a positive sense of self. Goodley notes that this formulation allows it to be compared with concepts of sexism and racism. 'Disablement' refers to the practical consequences of disablism.

For Goodley, as with Linton, what matters is not the particular terminology preferred by different scholars but rather:

A shared interest in appropriate language that does not demean is culturally sensitive and recognises the humanity of disabled people before disability or impairment labels. - Goodley 2010:9

In the context of dance a range of terms are and have been used to describe either dance works or companies that feature the work of self-described disabled artists. Sometimes these engage with questions of power and structure, who is in charge, with phrases like 'disability led' or 'disability company'. They also wrestle with indicating a situation where disabled and non-disabled dance together with terms like 'mixed ability', 'inclusive' or 'integrated'.

The term 'integrated' suggests a desire for both a parity and creative interaction between the unique range of movement of both disabled and nondisabled dancers. The term inclusive suggests an invitation for the disabled artist to join non-disabled dancers, adapting their contribution in terms of an existing non-disabled aesthetic that places higher value on bodies with a wider range of movement. They can in one sense, indicate the conscious intention to give parity to the contributions of all dancers, how much these intentions are realised in any one work or in company practices is a more complicated matter.

## **2.2 Conceptualising Disability and Impairment.**

The philosopher Walter Gallie (1912-1988) argues that aesthetic, ethical and political concepts such as Art or Democracy are 'essentially contested', in other words they are of their very nature open to different and competing conceptualisations (Gallie 1956a, 1956b). He argues, in effect, that the meanings of the concepts (to which we can add disability) are inherently unstable. Gallie suggests we can deal with disputes about the meanings of concepts in a number of ways: finding a new description to which all disputants can agree; convincing all parties to agree to adapt one usage; or making it clear that these are concepts with a number of different and distinct usages (Gallie 1956a: 1966).

The American philosopher Hilary Putnam notes that these disputed meanings form 'complex clusters' (Putnam 1975: 52), involving elements given different weighting in 'past and present usage', and creating tensions in the ways in which they are deployed. The political sociologist Gavin Williams argues

further that to engage with such disputed concepts we need to acknowledge that they acquire their full meanings only when they are 'deployed in specific arguments and are used in specific social and historical contexts' (Williams 2003:340). There are also likely to be conflicts of interest in which a set of meanings is to prevail in any particular context where disputes are not just about different meanings but their consequences in use.

The terms 'disability' or 'disabled' and 'impairment' like those of 'dance' or 'art' are internally complex concepts that arguably meet Gallie's criteria of essentially contestable concepts. Within particular discourses, for example, those of dance or disability studies their meanings can be seen to shift and change depending both on the context in which they are used and by whom evoking strong and passionate disputes as to which meanings are to prevail.

Questions as to what constitutes dance, its place within the arts, its capacity to convey meaning, and the basis of aesthetic appraisal of particular dance works arouses strong and often oppositional responses. Moreover, what it means to be a 'dance artist' and what that implies is similarly open to debate.

Two fundamental texts from the late twentieth century written by philosophers of dance Betty Redfern (1983) and Francis Sparshott (1995) remain an important part of the Dance Studies canon. Sparshott (1995) offers a comprehensive review of philosophical underpinnings of dance work with particular emphasis on the possibility that ways of dancing or particular dances may convey particular meanings.

Redfern (1983) investigates relationships between form, aesthetic judgment and imagination. While Sparshott gives consideration to questions of embodiment in the performance and reception of dance, both authors make little reference in these two works (beyond some comments on gender) to the meaning embodied in visible characteristics of individual dancers such as race, impairment or class.

In the same period, an anthology *What is Dance?* (Copeland and Cohen 1983) brought together a varied set of writings on the nature of dance by critics and scholars that again placed scant attention on class, race, or

impairment. There remain distinct and different usages of the term 'dance' with different authors considering form, others content, and yet others concerned with the meaning inscribed or conveyed by the dancing body.

Towards the end of the twentieth century a new field of Dance Studies emerged with scholars drawing from an increasing range of academic disciplines. The work of scholars in the field engaged with social categories of race, class, and gender and sexuality as markers of difference and sources of identity in relation to dance (Adair 1992; Thomas 1993, 1995, 2003; Martin 1998; Hewitt 2005; Stoneley 2007; Desmond 1997). These explorations have come to encompass works that incorporate a mixture of performance forms.

In her book *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance* (1997) the dance scholar Ann Cooper-Albright adds disability as a category of 'difference' to be addressed in her study of contemporary choreographic practice. The practice she examines extends to include Contact Improvisation (CI), and performances in which dance is blended with other performance forms. Cooper-Albright writes about companies whose membership represents particular categories of race or gender as well as new companies combining non-disabled and disabled dancers including in the US, Cleveland Dancing Wheels and in the UK, Candoco Dance Company.

With these new lines of inquiry, particularly the attention that Cooper-Albright gives to the work of disabled artists, scholars within Dance Studies opened up a range of possible critical approaches to dance work not included in earlier studies of dance. Earlier scholars focused on aesthetics, form, technique and the place of an individual work within what seemed to be an agreed and established dance canon, which spanned both historical and contemporary dance practices. The new scholarship opened considerations of both content and representation and the intention of a particular work and its challenge to existing ideas relating to race, gender or disability.



To investigate a disabled dance artist and her work, for example as Cooper-Albright does, involves consideration of a range of concepts, each of which is open to debate, including ability, disability, art and dance. Furthermore, consideration of who is or can be selected and presented as a performer in the sphere of professional dance can in turn raise questions and generate ideas and constructions about the dancing body of all dancers.<sup>11</sup>

### **2.3 The Emergence of Disability Studies and the Naming of Disability**

The emergence of Disability Studies in the 1980s as a designated field of study in the academy brought a multi disciplinary approach to impairment and disability that contrasted with existing research in individual fields of medicine, sociology and psychology. On both sides of the Atlantic the emergence of Disability Studies was closely aligned with groups of political activists whose experiences brought them in close proximity to medical, social welfare and cultural practices that were experienced as offensive, discriminatory and, disabling (Oliver and Barnes 2012; Snyder and Mitchell 2006; Barnes and Mercer 2003; Morris 1991).

The rapidity of growth in Disability Studies can be shown in the publication of two books, fifteen years apart. In a book published in 1997 Lennard J. Davis, an American historian and literary scholar, indicated the relatively hidden nature of this field of research into disability within the academy at that time (1997:3). To illustrate this point he gave the example of trying to locate his own scholarly work in this area, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (1995), in a university bookshop. Davis was directed to the self-help section where the book had been located, as there was as yet no category for academic books on the subject of disability.

Much later, in 2011, Goodley published a book documenting the growth and range of contemporary Disability Studies and launched at a large international gathering of disability scholars in Reykjavik. His book covers not only

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<sup>11</sup> See Cooper-Albright 1997 for a useful and wide-ranging discussion based on the links between visible differences in the bodies of dancers and ideal images of dancers.

accounts of current issues for disability scholars but also offers an overview of a wide range of research paradigms and, sometimes competing, strands of critical Disability Studies that have developed. Disability scholars draw variously on a range of academic disciplines including psychology, sociology, and cultural studies and seek to develop paradigms with relevance to different cultural and political contexts across the globe.

These distinctive conceptions of disability may be at variance and constitute an example of Putnam's complex clustering of conceptions. Taken together, in the context of disability studies they can be seen to represent overall a 'paradigm shift from disability as personal predicament to disability as social pathology' (Goodley 2011:xi). As such they offer the possibility to consider questions of discrimination, prejudice and marginalisation of people with impairments. As Goodley puts it:

If we locate disability in the individual we maintain a disabling status quo. In contrast by viewing disability as a cultural and political phenomenon, we ask serious questions about the social world.  
- Goodley 2011:xi

What is being presented is a move to disentangle a conflation of concepts of bodily impairment, sensory cognitive and physical and disability or disablement. The evidence emerging from disability scholars from a number of different disciplines, social sciences (Goodley 2011,) humanities (Mitchell and Snyder 1997; Snyder and Mitchell 2006;) and disability historical studies (Kudlick 2003) suggests that social responses to impairments vary and have varied across cultures, over time (Oliver and Barnes 2012:77-109, Kudlick 2003).

## **2.4 Conceptions of Disability in UK Disability Studies: The Social Model**

The social model is a social constructionist model of disability that has been central to the development of UK Disability Studies<sup>12</sup>. It draws upon ideas originally formulated in close collaboration between scholars and disabled activists in the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in the late 1970s. The model emphasises issues of social construction rather than those of classification and management according to medical diagnoses under a medical model of disability.

The UK disability movement as a social movement identified a need to find a model that would unite rather than separate people with a wide range of sensory cognitive or intellectual impairments through focusing on external arrangements that disadvantaged and disabled them.<sup>13</sup> In other words to find the kind of shared agreement over the meaning of concept suggested by Gallie in order to pursue a political project that addresses exactly those inequalities that are exposed in the ODI survey above.

Colin Barnes and Mike Oliver (2012) two influential architects and proponents of the social model from its inception re-iterate they are offering a model and not a fully constructed social theory of disability in all its complexities and cultural nuances. As such it is a 'simplified representation of a complex social reality' that can offer disabled people a basis for organisation and 'an alternative understanding of the experience and reality of disability' (2012:12).

The focus is in effect, on an individual's relationship to a disabling society and upon barriers to the participation of disabled people in both public and private spaces. The model refuses to conflate disability and impairment and sees disability as socially constructed.

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<sup>12</sup> See Goodley 2011 and Barnes and Mercer (2003) for useful overviews of a social model developed in collaboration between sociologist Mike Oliver (2004) and political activist Vic Finkelstein (2004) and the resultant disputes over its value in use. See also Oliver and Barnes (2012) for a re-iteration of the model in relation to other developing paradigms in disability studies.

<sup>13</sup> The Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) issued its first manifesto in 1976.

The disabled individual is an ideological construction related to the core ideology of individualism and the peripheral ideologies related medicalisation and normality. Oliver 1990: 58

The social model began by offering a conception of disability that could be employed within a political project aiming to shift attitudes towards disabled people, to demand shifts in public policies relating to housing, education and employment and to change the shape and accessibility of the built environment. It represented a tool with which to address the marginalisation, of disabled people in private and public arenas, their relative poverty and powerlessness.

The passion with which debates around its current value as a model of disability can be seen to stem as much from its symbolic value for disabled individuals with as its power to direct the research towards achieving shifts in public provision. It was able to offer a sense of self-esteem and value as an individual, and forging of a group identity and the power of joint action.

It has, however, been challenged within the disability movement as been too narrow in its formulation which does not allow for differential experiences of disadvantage linked to gender, class, or sexual orientation (Thomas and Corker 2006, Corker and Shakespeare 2006). Two feminist disability scholars, Carol Thomas and Liz Crow have raised the possibility that some impairments may in themselves be disabling in the sense of limiting an individual's capacity to engage in everyday life (Thomas, 1999; Crow1996).

Applying this model to the marginalisation of disabled people in professional dance the social model shifts attention to a wide range of issues around access to dance training, performing spaces and the profession. The social model demands attention to the built environment, physical access to dance rehearsal studios, theatre auditorium, stage and dressing rooms. It also concerns styles and ways of learning associated, with different forms of communication, access to learning support, to equipment such as hearing loops, training material in forms to meet variations in physical mobility, perception and sensory functioning.

The social model places a distinct focus on material conditions, questions of power and agency and economic social and political forces. Barnes and Mercer, do, however, attend to the prevalence of negative and 'demeaning cultural stereotypes' of disabled people (2003:41) as part of the social oppression of disabled people (Barnes and Mercer 2003:41). They point to a kind of 'cultural imperialism' in cultural representations of disability (2003:88), citing Davis' notion of a 'hegemony of normalcy' (Davis cited in Barnes and Mercer 2003:96) that constructs and privileges ideas of normate, able-bodies in contra-distinction to those culturally marked as non-normate or impaired.

In dance this raises questions concerning which bodily presentations and which bodies can be presented as expressive performing bodies. When disabled dancers with bodies that clearly do not conform to historical constructions of normate dancing bodies enter the professional stage they present challenges to attitudes and cultural stereotypes around disability, impairment and the nature of aesthetics within a dance performance.

## **2.5 The Place for Individual Experience of Impairment within the Social Model**

Sociologists and disability scholars Tom Shakespeare and Nicholas Watson (1997) offer an overview of debates emerging in British Disability Studies in the 1990s including concerns raised by Thomas and Crow on the place of research into the embodied experience of impairment and its differential effects. Shakespeare and Watson (1997) argued for a pluralistic approach that could attend to 'differences within the disability community' (299), but would still allow engagement with the distinctions between disability and impairment.

They point to the need to allow for potentially complex and dynamic connections between 'impairment, environment and social interaction' (298). They raise the question of not simply enumerating examples but the need to understand different and individual embodied experiences of impairment that may be potentially disabling (Shakespeare and Watson 1997, Shakespeare

2006; Watson 1997, Such exploration need not, of itself, exclude the need to focus on disabling attitudes towards such bodily restrictions.

It is undeniable that some impairments may be associated with periods of pain and fatigue that may be episodic or constant. The nature of impairment and its impact can remain relatively constant or vary considerably and unpredictably over time<sup>14</sup>.

What then becomes important is how this variation can be expected and accommodated. The dancer Jess Allen (2010) offers a practical example in her career as a performer with a rheumatic condition that has a changing day-to-day impact on her movement range. The environment in which Allen worked with for dance company, Blue Eyed Soul, allowed for an approach where two versions of the same movement phrase could allow for this variation in ability. While the impairment might be seen as disabling in limiting her functioning, the working environment in which it can be accommodated is not.

This example also raises questions about the meaning given both to the painful and intermittent effects for the individual. As a trained performer Allen has to consider what pain in the body may signify. Is it the result of the exhaustion and effects of repetitive movement that any dancer will experience? Can she make small changes in execution of a movement, work to increase muscle strength that will protect against injury when touring work or is it a signal that presages an episode of rheumatoid inflammation of joints for which she must prepare?

Not all impairments of bodily functions are linked to illness or a need for medical intervention but for Allen it is how these links are played out that is of interest. It is possible to see a link between a medical condition and how it impacts on her functioning in specific but changing ways. Taking this further it can be seen that it is the principles of choreographic practice, underpinned by

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<sup>14</sup> See for example Thom (2012) for a detailed account of the ways in which the impact of Tourette's syndrome varies from day to day.

the culture and embedded values of a dance company that described itself as 'inclusive', that prevent disabling consequences for Allen.

The ethos of the company allows for choreographic practices that can accommodate Allen's particular impairment and its changing impact. The company welcomed variations in physicality in their dancers as a valuable part of its aesthetic. For Blue Eyed Soul, Allen's physicality can be seen as representing a variation that is to be expected and responded to with ingenuity on both sides rather than one that excludes her automatically from consideration as a performer. This approach allowed Allen to exercise her right or capability to work as a professional dancer

## **2.6 The impact of the Social Model on Scholarly and Artistic Practice**

The social model is one that has powerful and emotional relevance for many scholars and artists. It can offer a powerful source of meaning where the individual is able to explore the extent to which their personal identity and experience is shaped by and shapes understanding of the world in which they live as well as a potential source for their creative work.

Feminist activist, performance artist and scholar Liz Crow describes the impact of the social model on her own thinking in her introduction to an influential paper. In the paper she re-visits the difficult question of different experiences of impairment at an individual level:

My life has two phases: before the social model of disability, and after it. Discovering this way of thinking about my experiences was the proverbial raft in stormy seas. It gave me an understanding of my life, shared with thousands, even millions, of other people around the world, and I clung to it. Crow 1996:55

Crow remains a strong proponent of the social model in her practice as an artist but in this paper she nevertheless poses a question to a community of disabled scholars and activists:

Why has impairment been so excluded from our analysis? Do we believe that admitting there could be a difficult side to impairment will undermine the strong, positive (SuperCrip) images of our campaigns?  
- Crow 1996:60

She argues that:

What we need is to find a way to integrate impairment into our whole experience and sense of our selves for the sake of our own physical and emotional well-being, and, subsequently, for our individual and collective capacity to work against disability. Crow1996: 63

Crow can be seen to be discussing a dilemma facing a disabled artist who might seek to draw on personal experience as a material for her artistic expression. From the political agenda and strategies of a disability movement any questioning of negative aspects of impairment, like her fatigue' could be seen as troubling and diminishing its ability to unite disabled people in confronting pre-existing prejudices in a world dominated by ideas of disability as tragedy. As an artist it might be one perspective that deepens her communications with an audience and speaks to shared human experiences.

Throughout her 1996 paper Crow draws attention both to potentially positive and to negative affects and effects associated with phenomenological experiences of impairment. She couples this, however, with consideration of how the meaning is shaped by the environment within which this occurs.

Barnes and Oliver (2012) two influential architects and proponents of the social model from its inception re-iterate they are offering a model and not a fully constructed social theory of disability. As such it is a 'simplified representation of a complex social reality 'that can offer disabled people a basis for organisation and 'an alternative understanding of the experience and reality of disability' (2012:12). They write from a Marxist perspective averring that that:

the core ideological construction of the concept of disability has been determined by the core ideology of capitalism - individualism and



peripheral ideologies associated with medicalisation. - Barnes and Oliver 2012:119

For Barnes and Oliver, attention to the individual, or indeed upon personal experience crucially distracts from confronting social and political factors that impact negatively on the lives of disabled people. They are arguing for attention to the nature of the world of work, ownership of the means of production and examination of the conditions and nature of labour. Yet personal experience can and is central to the creative work of an artist.

## **2.7 Is the Personal Political?**

Crow's perspective can be seen to incorporate ideas that linked her to a feminist ideology in the 1970s. The slogan of the feminist movement 'the personal is political'<sup>15</sup> asserted the need to attend to both individual experience and to the context in which individuals live their lives. Crow's artistic practice in installation art incorporates her performing body. When using the body for creative work the question of the personal can be considered in relation to two experiences of the body.

The first relates to phenomenological experiences of that body, kinaesthetic and sensory, experiences of an individual and private nature where the body can be seen as a body for self. The second relates to experiences of that body as a body for others, viewed by others in ways that may be socially and culturally shaped, and is a public matter.

In this second sense the artist can choose whether to take into consideration how that body may be perceived by others in her use of her body as both expressive body and body of meaning for others, and thus in the context of performance. If, as in the case of Crow, there is a strong political intention woven into her artistic work that fits with the social model, there is then a question to be raised about a potential place for personal and private experiences of impairment effects within her performance.

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<sup>15</sup> The origin of this slogan which was widely used in the 1970s and 1980s is uncertain see for example Hanisch (2006)

Crow illustrated this dilemma in interviews when she talked about her durational work *Bedding In, Bedding Out* (2013), a work developed during 2012 in response to proposed changes to the system of state benefits available to disabled people.

*Bedding In, Bedding Out* is a durational piece, performed at different lengths that vary between 30-48 hours and in a number of venues and festivals including the Edinburgh Fringe, Salisbury Art gallery and SPILL festival in Ipswich. Crow remains in her bed. Members of her audiences were invited to sit around her bedside, with a blurring of private and public spaces. Specific times were scheduled where audience members as individuals were invited to engage in direct conversation with Crow and live twitter feeds and audio recordings were incorporated in the performance.

In a review of the work, Jo Verrent, the artist and disability arts consultant, commented on the impact of Crow's decision to incorporate personal experience in the work:

Liz is a disability artist and activist, known for big, bold statements and with a big, bold personality to match. That's why *Bedding Out*, a piece in which Liz inhabits her bed in gallery spaces for 48 hours at a stretch, is so powerful.... In *Bedding Out* we don't see big, bold Liz, we see instead the secret side that Liz has hidden for years. For being 'big bold Liz' takes its toll, and periods of bed rest are required to recuperate and recharge. - Verrent 2012a

The context within which the work was created and performed was a controversial process in 2012 that involved a re-framing of the nature of a welfare system of benefits payments available to British disabled people and of the basis upon which these could be accessed.

The events in the UK raise questions about a 'just society', something that is considered by philosophers Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen who propose that ideas of a just society can encompass diversity in the individual capabilities of its citizenry (Nussbaum and Sen 1993).

They argue, however, that even in an ideal and just society where a disabled and a non-disabled person may receive the same income, the disabled person may have additional needs and require additional resources to meet these before being able to function on an equal basis (Nussbaum and Sen 1993, Nussbaum 2007).

Prior to 2012, the UK benefits system addressed some of the issues raised by Nussbaum and Sen through a system of welfare benefits that included a Disabled Living Allowance, Incapacity Benefits and a number of provisions incorporated in an Access to Work package. In 2012 the coalition government then in power devised a new list of criteria included in a Work Capability Test to be applied to all applicants and current recipients of these resources.

There were a number of major criticisms at the time raised by disabled people, scholars, major organisations representing people with a wide range of impairments, and political activists. Detailed consideration of the objections lie beyond the scope of this thesis.<sup>16</sup> Criticisms included: the conflicting aims between the aims of creating a more rational accessible and simplified system of benefits and that of reducing the total costs of payments in a period of austerity; inefficiencies and inconsistencies in application of the test, and the failure to distinguish factors relevant to different patterns of impairment effects over time.

Central to these criticisms was the emphasis on a particular construction of disability rather than ability. An applicant was being asked to prove what they could not do. New applicants and existing benefit holders were not being asked what they can or might do with appropriate and adequate resources and imaginative assessment of these possibilities. In other words they were not being asked what structural, attitudinal and environmental factors disable,

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<sup>16</sup> The Royal National Institute for the Blind (2013) offers a range of briefing documents and material on their website that outline the principle objections to the reforms and in particular the use of the Capability Test in relation to the new Employment Support Allowance.

create barriers or limit these possibilities. This shift is echoed in Crow's words in an interview for the journal *Disability Now* about *Bedding Out*:

It's come out of a personal dilemma that I've been facing. For a long time I've lived a life in two halves. So there's the life that people see, that attempts to be animated and happening and to go out there and change the world. Then there's my private life where I recover, where I spend most of my time at home, a lot of time lying down, a lot of time in bed. And that isn't seen. I conceal it very carefully because I know it's not a socially acceptable way to be. But then the benefits changes come along and that doesn't work any more. Because the problem is that if I show my public self, that's taken as evidence that I don't need any support. And what I'm required to do is parade this concealed and very hidden self which I don't even know how to take out in public in order to convince people that I do need support. - Crow cited in Macrae 2013

In *Bedding Out* Crow maintains the distinction between impairment as delineated in the social model but incorporates aspects of personal and phenomenological experience of her impairment as part of the work a life 'lived in two halves'. The work aims not only to expose the realities of living with impairment but also to confront public attitudes and policies that impact negatively on individual experience. Crow offers aspects of both a private and public self.

Barnes and Mercer urge caution when disabled artists make explicit the effects of impairment to a 'non-disabled audience' (2003:107). They identify an 'uncertain boundary line between challenging disability and encouraging voyeurism and pathologising impairment' (Barnes and Mercer 2003:107). An artist cannot, in the end, control reception of her work or how an individual audience receives her performance. The artist can, however, consider how to use their own body and their experience in the service of what they aim to express.

In one sense, Crow can be seen to use her own body to represent the situation of a class of people, those with disabilities, and in another her own unique situation. She acts in the role of citizen protesting against a state where new public policies threaten to limit and disable her capacity (and that of other disabled people) to participate in public life. Crow encourages others to join in the debate and protest. At one and the same time she is both artist and political activist drawing on themes of both personal and public concern.

Crow presents herself as an established and accomplished artist together with the toll that demands of her body. She rests, as her body demands but continues to reflect and to engage with others as she does so. In so doing she resists demeaning cultural stereotypes and is neither the passive demure invalid nor the impossibly strong super woman, 'SuperCrip' heroine who never falters and triumphs over the effects of her 'disability'.

The work is overtly political and concerned with possible shifts in public provision that may result in a diminution of hard won social and financial arrangements that support the right of disabled people to take up their places in society as full UK citizens. It also engages with disabling cultural imagery and representations of impairment within a particular society that of the UK in the early twenty first century.

## **2.8 Conceptions of Disability in US Disability Studies**

Jacobus tenBroek (1916-1968) an American political scientist, jurist and disability activist established in 1940 the National Federation of the Blind, a de facto union of blind people combining together to share knowledge and experience and to challenge public attitudes. In his seminal article published in 1966 '*The Right to Live in the World*', tenBroek discusses contemporary barriers that limited how and where disabled people might participate in US society as full citizens.

tenBroek argues of that world that 'if disabled people have the right to live they must have the right to make their way into it' (1966:848). Disabled people should be free to exercise rights to privacy, to establishment of family life, to

choice of accommodation and rights to independent living. He asks the question 'are persons after all not to be persons if they are physically disabled?'(849). TenBroek equates the struggle for the rights of disabled people to others in American history:

As with the black man, so with the blind. As with the Puerto Rican, so with post polio... As with the Indian so with the indigent disabled.  
- tenBroek 1966:858

Davis describes a range of US organisations seeking changes in the law as representing a civil rights /minority model (2002:11). The goal was to achieve a legislative framework to uphold rights to education, access to public spaces and to housing and employment in a country with written constitution and formal Bill of Rights for its citizens. The minority model draws on the civil rights movements of the 1960s in which women and people of colour sought to enforce their rights as full and equal citizens of the US.

As in the UK, the last decades of the twentieth century in the US were marked by an intensive period of political activism by disabled people. It is possible to distinguish some differences of emphasis and approach between the US and UK linking to the particular social and political institutions and histories in the two countries. For example, the development of an Independent Living Movement in the US, from the early 1970s, was closely associated with the activities of conscripted and professional soldiers who had returned from the Vietnam War with bodies reshaped by injuries sustained in battle.

In the light of its written Bill of Rights the US movement was concerned with enforcing rights to independence as disabled citizens. In the UK it was civilian residents of residential homes and institutions who spearheaded changes<sup>1718</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Detailed accounts of the movement, from the establishment of an Independent Living Centre in Berkley in 1972 can be found in the archives of the Disabilities Rights and Independent Movement available from <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/drilm/index.html>

<sup>18</sup> For a history of the Independent Living Movement in the UK see Evans (2003)

and looked to the particular organisations of health and social care within the UK welfare state.

The social and civil rights models discussed in this chapter offer ways of unpacking and challenging how social institutions and arrangements disable people with impairments. Each model emphasises the importance of addressing questions of disablism, of disadvantage and exclusion. Their influence can be seen in the passing of anti-discrimination legislation that emerged at the beginning of the twenty first century in both the US and the UK. These laws begin to address those barriers demanding that in public settings, health, educational and social provision make reasonable accommodations to ensure the rights of disabled people.

These models can be seen to offer a basis for action to identify and to challenge existing barriers so that disabled people are able to exercise their rights to access theatrical stage as well as theatrical foyer. They can be seen to argue for the right of disabled artists to compete on an equitable basis with non-disabled artists for training and employment opportunities within the field of dance. The question of what kind of dance work can be created and how an audience may come to view the work requires consideration of how both artist and viewer may engage with non-normate bodies in performance.

The working conditions for Jess Allan with Blue Eyed Soul allow the variations in her bodily capacities to be taken account in her performance. The social model of disability gives support and meaning for Crow and her development as an artist. In her work she engages with other aspects of impairment and disability, the misconceptions and cultural stereotypes around impairment and its consequences.

Jacobus tenBroek noted in 1996:

The actual physical limitations resulting from disability more often than not play little role in determining whether the physically disabled are allowed to move about and be in public places. Rather that judgment for the most part results from a variety of considerations related to public attitudes, public attitudes which not infrequently are quite

erroneous and misconceived. These include public imaginings about what the inherent physical limitations must be; public solicitude about the safety of keeping the disabled out of harm's way; public feelings of protective care and custodial security; public doubts about why the disabled should want to be abroad anyway; and public aversion to the sight of them and the conspicuous reminder of their plight. -tenBroek 1966:842

tenBroek's phrase 'public imaginings' around disability and impairment offers a useful way of grouping a range of cultural forms and representations of disability. Crow can be seen in her work both to engage with a powerful Victorian stereotype of the invalid woman and to subvert it with the challenges she issues from her bed of rest.

The question of these 'public imaginings' around disability is extended and explored in the writing of later US disability scholars who draw on cultural and film studies to consider representations of disability and the uses of disability and bodily impairment in cultural forms. If we are to consider the work of the disabled artist it is necessary to consider the nature of these imaginings both from the perspective of audience member and artist, and their impact.



### **3 Imagining Disability: Images, Representations and Identities**

This chapter considers how a number of disability scholars have engaged with the shifting nature of representations of disability and impairment. It begins by considering cultural and social representations of disability and impairment and the shifting and often contradictory nature of these concepts. It moves to consideration of spectatorship, both in the everyday and within performing arts. It ends by considering how these cultural and social phenomena may intersect with questions of personal identity for a disabled individual and artist.

#### **3.1 Cultural Representations of Disability**

From the 1990s onwards, Davis himself and many other US disability scholars have turned to explorations of how disabled people are represented and imagined in a range of cultural forms. These explorations have been informed by developments within cultural studies, and film and literary studies particular. The focus of these scholars has been on current and historical cultural conceptions and representations of disability, ability, abnormality and normality within cultural texts in the arts and humanities (Garland-Thomson 1997; Davis, 2002; Snyder and Mitchell 2006). Here the emphasis can be seen to shift to considerations of not just what is designated atypical, to considerations of the process by which what is deemed 'normal' is socially and culturally constructed.

The place and function of cultural representations of disability in the arts in humanities is a central theme in the work of cultural theorists, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (1997,2000,2006). Mitchell and Snyder argue that marks of visible difference come to be used in art, novels and films to equate a 'tautological link between biology and self (real or imagined) that cannot be unmoored' (3). An 'ideology of the physical' constructs an 'imagined bridge' between outer appearance and inner reality that:

seeks to lure the reader/viewer into the mystery of whether discernible defects reveal the presence of an equally defective moral and civil character. - Mitchell and Snyder 1997:13.

Mitchell and Snyder (2000) offer the metaphor of ' narrative prosthesis', to draw attention to a scholarship that attends both to how and in what form disabled characters and images of disability are employed and for what purpose.

In a later work, Mitchell and Snyder consider research in film studies and the wide spread use of disabled figures in modern film, either as metaphors for a disordered society or for particular effect. They discuss in particular what they typify as 'body genre films' where a 'disabled' character is used as signifier of monstrous acts (sexual deviant or psychopathic killer), victimhood and passivity ('blind victim' of a stalker) or of tragic loss and as a vehicle to elicit excessive or extreme sensation in the viewer (Mitchell and Snyder 2006:134-156).

The film scholar, Martin Norden's historical study of the portrayal of physical disability in the cinema draws examples from nearly a hundred years of filmmaking (Norden1994). His study offers numerous examples in films starting with the early years of the US film industry. What he offers is a study that illuminates what Bourdieu would designate the historical space, or field in which these portrayals are developed and disability becomes commodified.

In an overview of his project Norden (1994:i-x) outlines his intention to consider links between portrayals of disability, attitudes towards physical disability in 'mainstream US society' and how these shape and are shaped by the structures of the industry He also sets out to understand the enduring popularity of these film portrayals of disability with audiences whose perceptions of disability are shaped as much by the film portrayals as pre-existing attitudes towards disability.

Davis considers the ubiquitous use of disabled characters in nineteenth century novels and their use in defining conceptions of the normal (2002:79-101). Davis (1995,1997,2002) attends to the contrast between the wide diversity of abilities and capabilities present within any chosen population and the construction of conceptions of the normal. Davis employs the term *normalcy*<sup>19</sup>, an American English synonym for normality that first entered the lexicon in mid nineteenth century America (1995:25). For Davis, both disability and *normalcy* are unstable categories, created in certain social and historical contexts and open to reconsideration and reformulation (2002:9-32).

Davis contrasts conceptions of the ideal human form, for example in art, an ideal to which no individual human can conform, and the emergence of conceptions of the normal body in the mid nineteenth century. His detailed and nuanced historical analysis (Davis 1995: 23-49) links the rise of eugenics with development of statistical methods in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Davis suggests the need to move from considering how disability is constructed as a category to a focus on processes and historical alliances between statistical theory and eugenics that created ideas around what is a norm against which bodies and peoples should be measured (1995:32) together with ideas of normality or what Davis terms '*normalcy*' (1995:32).

What Davis offers is a return to recognising those variations in ability and bodily form are normal, commonplace, and distributed widely across any population. Impairment and variation in functioning is by implication just another part of human functioning in everyday life. What can be seen to stem from this is a challenge to the normal/abnormal framework or binary, which again, has resonances with dance.

The cultural images of disability as discussed above include strongly divergent but equally powerful images of dependency, heroism and villainy.

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<sup>19</sup> These ideas have begun to engage disability scholars at an international level and three conferences organized around the theme of 'Theorizing Normalcy and the Mundane' were hosted by Sheffield Hallam University in 2010, 2012 and 2013.

These images can be identified in public responses to disabled people, perhaps most starkly during the summer of 2012 when the Olympic and Paralympic Games were hosted in London.

### **3.2 Cultural Images of Disability.**

In the period immediately prior to the Paralympics the Glasgow Media Group published a study that compared representation of disabled people in five newspapers during the periods 2004-5 and 2010-11 (Briant, Watson and Philo: 2011). The report's detailed findings showed a major increase in the later period in the use of pejorative language around disability and disabled people. It identified the growing presence of stories about fraudulent claims for benefits by 'undeserving' disabled people (2011:5) that bore no relationship to the actual reported figures of fraudulent claims within this group.

A survey of information gathered through focus groups demonstrated wildly inaccurate assumptions by non-disabled members of the groups with some suggesting that up to 70 per cent of claimants for disability and extended sickness benefits were fraudulent (2011:4). Disabled people were being portrayed as scroungers. The descriptive language presented them as fraudsters, burdens on the state and other members of society as well as unnecessarily desirous of a nurture to which they had no rightful claim. The accounts by participants in the focus groups accounts paralleled the set of derogatory images in the press and broadcast media linked to proposed changes in welfare provision for disabled people

A very different set of images portraying individual as disabled athletes as 'hero' were incorporated in a series of Superhero advertisements featuring the UK athletes who were to compete in the London Paralympics of 2012. In 2012, UK television commentators on the Paralympics returned again and again to accounts of struggle and overcoming obstacles attributed to individual athletes. Disabled and deaf artists performing at the Unlimited Festival on the South Bank in London were similarly hailed as exceptional and inspiring figures.

The UK public was faced with strongly contrasting images of disabled people as hero, scrounger, inspirational figure and cunning fraudster. It is the nature and roots of the ambivalence incorporated in these contradictory, cultural images of disability and disabled people and how they are constructed that is taken up in the work of Dan Goodley

### **3.3 Ambivalence and Cultural Images of Disability**

Two UK social psychologists and disability scholars, Deborah Marks and Dan Goodley, consider the psychic mechanisms that contribute to both the ambivalent nature of cultural images of disability and the strong emotions that accompany them.

Goodley (2010) turns to the work of the analyst Melanie Klein (1882-1960). For Klein, the human infant is faced with an intolerable dilemma in which nurturance and survival means dependence on another that must inevitably fail them. The associated affects, of love and hate or destructiveness, are directed towards the same 'good' m/other who meets these needs for nurturance and the 'bad' absent m/other who (inevitably at times) fails to do so (Goodley 2010: 8). In an attempt to solve this conundrum the infant engages psychic mechanisms of splitting, and separating images of two different experiences of the m/other as human subject and enabling them to keep two powerful sets of emotions apart.

Growing into adulthood means being 'tumultuously caught up in this conflict of a sense of independence and autonomy (ego) and the desire to remain dependent (id)' (Goodley 2010:15). Goodley suggests that it is these archaic vestiges of the infantile experiences that are re-evoked in the context of adult encounters with symbols or images of disability that reawaken early and ambivalent feelings around independence and inter-dependence (Goodley 2010:18-19).

For Goodley, this 'splitting of the human subject' becomes amplified in societal arrangements that emphasise the dependency of disabled people and place strong emphasis on the independence and 'mastery' of non-

disabled people (Goodley 2010:15). The 'split disabled subject' becomes both 'appealing and appalling', both desired and rejected, and creates a '*necessary* place for disabling culture to play out its ambivalent relationship with independence and dependence' (Goodley 2010:15, italics in original).

By contrast, Marks (1999c) draws on models of psychic functioning developed within the British Object Relations School of psychoanalytic studies<sup>20</sup>. She considers inner and unconscious psychic structures and defences against experiencing the emotion and pain associated with impairment effects upon both the disabled and non-disabled person in personal encounters. She argues that we are located in:

a narcissistic culture in which people strive for 'independence' and 'perfection'.<sup>21</sup> The parts of the self which are unacceptable in a normalizing culture such as bodily imperfection and dependency - (we all experience them in different degrees) are kept outside conscious awareness and come to be split off and projected onto those who have been socially constituted as damaged. Marks 1999c: 21.

In other words, according to Marks, parts of self that are experienced as linked to intolerable and painful feelings and anxieties are disavowed. They are experienced as 'not me', not a part of the 'me' that I can bear to recognise. In this process of disavowal these parts are psychically parked in another deemed lesser, damaged, disabled, where they can be safely viewed, pitied, hated or despised and kept at a safe distance. (Marks 1999c: 15).

What both Marks and Goodley offer is a way of linking individual psychic mechanisms processes to group processes and the operation of a social psyche that Goodley terms a 'collective non-disabled psyche' (2010:4) making it possible to reflect on ways in which:

non-disabled people and a disabling culture symbolise, characterise, construct, gaze at, project, split off, react, repress and direct images of

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<sup>20</sup> This model views human beings and psychic development as stemming from a drive to make relationships with others. For a more detailed examination of this approach see Rayner (1990).

<sup>21</sup> For a clear over view of Klein's ideas and their application to everyday life see Segal 1985.

impairment and disability in ways that subjugate and, at times, terrorise disabled people whilst upholding the precarious autonomy of non-disabled people. - Goodley 2010:5

These models of psychic functioning can contribute to understanding the forceful emotive and attacking language used in framing objections to the presence of disabled people in public spaces including performance venues. In an article first published in the New Yorker in 1989 and later reprinted in a volume of her writing, their dance critic Arlene Croce attacks what she terms 'victim art' and the appearance on stage of 'dancers with physical deformities who appear nightly in roles requiring beauty of line' (Croce 2000:710).

Whatever rationale for her objections can be advanced, there seems to be an emotional force underlying this powerful attack. This is conveyed in the language used in the article, particularly with words like 'Victim art' and 'deformed bodies' conveys a sense of the irrational and the engagement of the psychic mechanisms discussed by Marks and Goodley.

As a critic holding a respected position in the field of dance, Croce can be seen to draw on technical and aesthetic considerations that engage a critical register that is itself shaped by historical developments and conventions within the dance field.

### **3.4 Conceptions of Disability and Performance**

More widely, in her role as critic, Croce can be seen to approach dance performances with particular ideas of what constitutes beauty and how dance works should be considered in relation to an established dance canon. This approach differs from that of another approach to critical engagement with dance as exemplified by writing within the academic disciplines of dance and performance studies.

Dance Studies historian Ramsey Burt argues that aesthetic judgments do 'to some extent depend on knowledge of artistic traditions and conventions' (2006:19). He adds however, that such judgments are, not a- historical or value free (Burt 2000:20), leaving the basis of appraisal itself open to potential

scrutiny. Burt postulates that when reaching a conclusion about the aesthetic merit of a particular dance work 'aesthetic judgment on dance performance is...always caught up in questions about social and cultural aspects of the performance' (2000: 20). Furthermore he suggests that such considerations as to how social context is intertwined with the performance as a whole can and need to be included in the reading of a particular work.

If we follow Burt then as dancers with different bodies enter the dance field, dancers with different forms of movement, we are faced with considerations about how such work is to be evaluated. What new technical competencies need to be included within a critical register, what works may be included within in the dance canon as comparators, what is the intention of the work, and to which audiences is the work directed?

There is a further question as to who might evaluate that work. Knowledge of artistic traditions and conventions of performance and dance scholarship is no longer solely the prerogative of non-disabled dancers, critics or analysts of dance. There is a growing corpus of critical academic writing and dance journalism by disabled as well as non-disabled writers on which to draw when considering the varied work of individual disabled artists and companies and the audiences they seek to engage.

Despite this growth, there is not as yet a comprehensive account of the growth of companies featuring the work of disabled artists or that documents the work of individual artists. Sandahl and Auslander (2005) include a number of chapters on the work of individual dance companies. Benjamin (2010, 2002) provides valuable insights into the development of Candoco Dance Company, the pioneering UK Dance Company as well as drawing attention to companies in other countries.

Cooper-Albright (1997) offers a useful analysis of the work of a selection of companies and disabled dance artists performing in the UK and the US. Kupper's growing body of work (2012, 2003, 2000) similarly considers a selection of artists and companies as well as offering accounts of the work of a number of disabled artists working specifically within a disability arts'



aesthetic. Specialist journals including in the UK Disability Arts Online (DAO), Disability Now and, Disability and Society and in the US Disability Studies Quarterly provide a forum for reviews and analysis of individual works or artists.

An example of the variety of both the critical register and the criteria for analysis that are emerging can be seen in the ways Koppers and Cooper-Albright have approached the work of the US dance company Cleveland Dancing Wheels. Dancing Wheels is a company employing both disabled and non-disabled dancers who work within a ballet-based aesthetic.

Cooper-Albright (1997) considers the relevant positioning of disabled and non-disabled in the work of the company opining that:

For as long as the representational basis for their work is steeped in the ideological values of classical dance and formalist aesthetics (complete with fetishisation of line) their attempts to include dancers on wheels can very quickly get recast under the same old patronizing terms of abled and non disabled bodies -Cooper-Albright 1997:68

For Cooper-Albright the non-disabled dancers present a version of a 'classical' or normate ballet body shaped deliberately within the traditions, training techniques and aesthetics of classical ballet. She argues that there is as a result a built-in inequality between disabled and non-disabled dancers where the work merely 'reinstates the classical body within the disabled one' at the expense of disabled artists in the company (Cooper-Albright 1997:83-84).

Koppers, however, argues that attention needs to be given to the part played by that the hypervisibility of the wheelchair-based dancers dancing Wheel's performance work. For Koppers this hypervisibility functions to draw the viewer to questions of corporeality and the effort required to engage with the dance form and the physical differences present in *each* dancer whatever their abilities (Koppers 2000:122-125).

In Kuppers' analysis, she argues that the eye of the audience member is drawn to the way that individual dancers, disabled and non-disabled, extend aesthetic lines within the work and create symmetries thus providing 'exciting avenues for ballet choreographies' (Kuppers 2000:126). For Kuppers this opens the possibility of an embodied, inter-subjective and resonant response in audience members. Neither Cooper-Albright nor Kuppers discount the virtuosity or quality of the wheelchair-based performers. Each starts from a different register of critical analysis and values within which to address both form and aesthetic.

Kuppers (2000) distinguishes two groups of disabled dance artists: those who perform within an existing aesthetic in performances that often incorporate non-disabled dancers and a second group who deliberately perform disability. Kuppers demonstrates how the choice of and use made of the site of performance, the positioning of audience and different frameworks, both discursive and physical, can be used to de-stabilise meaning and perspective (2000:126). The works described in Kuppers' writings (2000,2003,2011) can be categorised as deliberately engaging with existing stereotypical emotional connections between disability, tragedy, loss or pluckiness and conceptions of asexuality or lack of personhood.

It can be safely argued that a professional dancer performs to an observing audience and asks to be seen. When the dancer's body is visibly impaired, aesthetic judgment becomes entwined with the kinds of social and cultural concerns that have been outlined so far in this chapter. The disabled artist deliberately seeks this audience, but in everyday life is subject to ways of viewing by an uninvited audience. It is this tension that will be examined in relation to the three artists in later chapters and raises questions around spectatorship within professional dance.

### **3.5 A Body on View: Spectatorship and the Disabled body**

For Kuppers, the disabled performer challenges, and has to negotiate, two areas of cultural meaning:

relative invisibility as an active member in a public sphere, and hypervisibility and instant categorization as passive consumer and victim. - Kuppers 2003:49

Kuppers (2003,2000) takes up the questions of spectatorship in considering the hypervisibility of a disabled body that draws attention, invited or uninvited from others. She conceptualises different public spaces in which such viewings may occur as different theatrical or performance venues: the aesthetic or performance stage; the medical stage or place of medical examinations; the everyday stage of the street and other public arenas (Kuppers 2003:31-48).

### **3.6 The Gaze**

Kuppers draws on a range of work within critical studies concerning the 'gaze', a concept summed up by Garland-Thomson as an 'oppressive act of disciplinary looking that subordinates its victim' (Kuppers 2009:9). The various formulations of the gaze start with ideas developed in the work of Michel Foucault (1926-1984), a French historian, philosopher and social theorist in his studies of the interconnections of power and knowledge and the discipline.

Foucault (1977) employs the analogy of the Panopticon,<sup>22</sup> the prison structure envisaged by Jeremy Bentham, the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and social theorist. Within the model structure for this prison, inmates are constantly visible to the surveilling gaze of a single guard rather than governed by threat of force. As Foucault states:

There is no need for arms, physical violence, and material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be a minimal cost. - Foucault, 1980: 155

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<sup>22</sup> For a useful account of the role of surveillance through CCTV cameras in the twenty first century see Koskela 2003.

This internalised overseeing gaze<sup>23</sup> is part of what Foucault terms a system of biopower. Biopower sets the parameters of what is desirable and normal in the body and societal arrangements that produce and maintain docile bodies. These are bodies that conform, indeed mould themselves, without question to meet the production needs of urban capitalism (Foucault 1976, 1980).<sup>24</sup> This self-scrutiny can be seen for example in the regimes of body care and training that are part of the practice of many modern citizens.

Foucault considers historical changes in medical practices from the Middle Ages where doctors were guided by patients' descriptions of their experience of illness. The subsequent growth in medical knowledge was shaped and fed by anatomical dissection and scientific exploration. Increasingly the patient's narrative became secondary to the knowledge and investigatory practices of the doctor within a powerful field of classificatory medicine (Foucault 1963).

This clinical gaze is the associated consequences of the development of this knowledge on the medical practitioner/patient relationship that remain of relevance to the medical model as identified by the social model theorists. In the act of classification and exploration the patient becomes largely reduced to a series of body parts, a reduction to pathologies to be explored by the doctor who is distanced from the patient in this process of objectification.

Power and knowledge now reside with the clinician. Foucault suggests that this process of classification becomes entwined not only with the binaries of illness and health but also with those of normality and abnormality. The sociologist Bryan Turner sums this up as follows:

Put simply, the doctor has replaced the priest as the custodian of social values. The panoply of ecclesiastical institutions of regulation

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<sup>23</sup> In French, Foucault uses *le regard*, to signify an act of looking.

<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was concerned with the historical development of a medical profession within his wider explorations of the interconnection between power, knowledge and body. *Naissance de la Clinique: Une Archéologie du Regard Médical* was published in 1963. It concerned the perceptions of medical professionals within teaching hospitals and other medical settings (cliniques) in France and changes in organisation of medical knowledge from the eighteenth century.

(the ritual order of sacraments, the places of vocational training, the hospice for pilgrims, places of worship and sanctuary) has been transferred through the evolution of scientific medicine to a panoptic collection of localised agencies of surveillance and control. Furthermore, the rise of preventive medicine, social medicine and community medicine has extended these agencies and regulation deeper and deeper into social life. - Turner 1987: 37-38

Foucault's different formulations of the gaze can be seen to contain several crucial elements at the level of individual interactions. One party occupies a dominant and powerful position over the other. The process engages classification or categorisation and a distancing from and objectification of the other. It is not a consciously malign process but when different aspects are internalized by gazer and gazed upon this has important consequences.

Complex sets of theories of the gaze have been developed by a number of writers<sup>25</sup>. Cooper-Albright, for example, introduced the concept of an 'ableist gaze' (1997:80) as one that distances and marks the disabled performer as different and inferior when measured against an internalized classical aesthetic and image of the classical dancing body. The disabled performer as object of this gaze is set apart, and fails against an internalized measure of the classical.

If this idea is linked to the psychic structures considered earlier then the power of the ableist gaze, a power that rests with the one who gazes, may be viewed as a psychic defence against acknowledging and experiencing any similarity between viewer and viewed. An example of the ableist gaze in action can be seen in Croce's disparaging attitude towards performers discussed earlier, when she wrote of the inferiority of the work of 'physically deformed' performers (Croce 2000:710).

In 1975, in a paper published within film studies, Laura Mulvey introduced the concept of a male gaze to consider the ways in which women were viewed on the film screen. The concept was then applied and developed by a number of

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<sup>25</sup> A critical overview of the development of gaze theory to including the colonial gaze can be found in Hunt (2002)

dance scholars<sup>26</sup>. This patriarchal male gaze represents an act incorporating ideas of domination and power that turns the female subject into an illicit object of male desire. It constitutes an act of voyeurism. The viewer gazes upon but never actively engages with the reality of the woman who is object of his desire or indeed with any desires she may have for him or others.

Garland-Thomson describes the gaze as a form of visual marking (2005a). She distinguishes the gaze from what she formulates as the 'normative stare that constructs the disabled' and for her staring does not simply mark the object of its stare but has a penetrative and intrusive quality. (Garland-Thomson 2005:32).

### 3.7 The Stare

Garland-Thomson distinguishes an intensive act of looking incorporated in a transgressive, intimate, interrogative and penetrative stare as an 'ocular response to what we don't expect to see' (2009:3). For her it is driven by curiosity about the novel, rewarded physiologically by increased dopamine levels but forbidden by strong social rules. Garland-Thomson prefers the term 'extraordinary' to that of impaired or disabled body.

For Garland-Thomson the staring at a person with an extraordinary body, creates 'an awkward partnership that estranges and discomforts both viewed and viewer' (Garland-Thomson 2009:31). She notes that such episodes of staring and being stared at form part of the daily experience of any person with a visibly out-of-the-ordinary body. Staring involves exchange and interaction that 'marks bodies by enacting a dynamic visual exchange between a spectator and a spectacle' (Garland-Thomson 2005b: 31).

As Goodley has observed staring and other forms of uninvited intrusion by strangers are a common occurrence for many disabled people (Goodley

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<sup>26</sup> See for example Adair (1992) and Cooper-Albright (1997). A useful collection of debates around the value of these concepts pertaining to questions of spectatorship in dance is available in a collection of writings edited by Jane Desmond (2006)

2013). His research respondents reported how complete strangers would, without prompting or encouragement, ask the respondents questions about their histories, how impairments were acquired, their sexual abilities, and the intimate management of their bodies. Here the motivation behind this intensive questioning appears to be the same free ranging curiosity that can be seen to lie behind the intensive staring directed to disabled people identified by Garland-Thomson.

Dance artist, practitioner, and performance theorist Sarah Whatley suggests that so long as disabled artists remain a small minority, audiences approach their performance with what she refers to as a conscious or unconscious 'pre-existing presumption of difference' (Whatley 2007:21). She does not make overt that audience member here, by implication means a non-disabled member of that audience. Based on her case study of students in training, Whatley notes how, over time, changes emerged in the ways her non-disabled students came to view the work of the disabled students. Whatley creates a possible typography of strategies employed in viewing work involving a disabled dance artist in performances on the professional stage (Whatley 2007:16).

Her categories represent a range of positions starting from one where the presence of a disabled artist erases all consideration of their artistry. At the end of the range is a viewing experience where disability 'becomes ordinary, one more bodily possibility' (20) for a viewer who remains open to new ways of seeing and experiencing difference and who is open to shifts in aesthetic. For Whatley what remain crucial are not just the openness of the viewer but also the intention of the choreographer/performer to find ways to engage with their audience to invite such shifts in perception.

Whatley drew on the experiences of her students, their own accounts and observations by their teachers. These observations covered a period of training for students and teachers that contributed to deeper knowledge and understanding of different ways of performing, and fostered an appreciation of different ways of moving and the creative possibilities afforded by different ways of engaging with dance (Whatley 2007).

So far this chapter has engaged with how, and perhaps why, ideas and definitions of disability and impairment have been constructed and how disability is represented. It now returns to the question of what it means to claim an identity as a disabled person and as an artist and to do so within social structures where classifications of disabled/non-disabled, impaired/non-impaired impact on the position of disabled people.

Identity is a social category that provides a way in which an individual may both distinguish his or herself from another person and link with others. In other words, develop a sense of self and self in relation to others. Identity is a personal and individual matter in the sense that it refers to a continuing sense of self, desire and agency, as well as a public and socio-political matter. It links one person to the wider groupings of individuals within a social world and the possibilities open to them.

### **3.8 Disability as Spoiled Identity**

The American sociologist Erving Goffman (1922-1982) used the theatrical metaphors of role and performance to consider how social identities and a sense of self are created and performed in interactions with others in social situations. He looks at how roles are developed and performed in everyday interactions with others and performed differently in different social arenas (Goffman 1959, 1968).

In his 1968 work *Stigma*, Goffman considers various aspects of what might now be termed the construction and management of a disabled identity. Goffman 1968 uses the term 'stigma' to identify an 'attribute that is deeply discrediting' (1968:13) and includes the visibility of impairment as such a discrediting attribute.

Goffman can be seen as considering a disabled identity that is both socially constructed and impacts on personal identity. In effect he is suggesting a spoiled or discrediting disabled identity is created and imposed in interactions with others. It becomes an identity to be managed by those assigned that identity by the non-stigmatised 'normal', a role to be performed in interactions



with others and an identity to be variously disguised or managed in social interactions (Goffman 1968).

His work introduces not only ideas of the personal impact of socially constructed values around disability but also introduces the idea of managing that impact in interactions with others. Goffman presents a disabled identity as an imposed identity and negative role. The individual seeks ways to enact it, to anticipate the response of others, and to find some place and dignity in that process (Goffman 1968). Goffman distinguishes what he terms a personal identity and a 'virtual social identity'<sup>27</sup> (1968:12) which carries with it expectations of how a disabled person is supposed to perform that role in encounters with strangers, non-disabled people.

Goffman offers a range of role performances open to the stigmatized individual including that of hiding or disguising his impairment so as to 'pass' as 'normal' (1968: 02-109). He notes, however that 'purposeful social action' can change perceptions about the 'undesirability' of a particular attribute, like impairment and thus allow for different social roles for person with a disabled identity (Goffman1968: 164).

The American jazz Dancer Mary Archbold offers an example of someone who has employed techniques of passing in pursuing her career as a dancer. In a radio interview in 2012 she describes in detail the ways in which she came to use a variety of bodily techniques in everyday encounters, auditions and performance that hid the existence of her prosthetic arm. As she explained:

I can hide it. It's definitely now a lot of stuff I do subconsciously. It's inherent in the way I move. Archbold 2012

She used speed of movement and choice of which side of her body to present to disguise the prosthetic hand in auditions and performances. Even in intimate situations as a young woman, she would hide the arm under a pillow during sexual encounters.

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<sup>27</sup> Goffman notes the difference between this virtual identity with strangers and a more nuanced social identity created over time in encounters with friends and colleagues.

The prosthesis is not required for performing everyday tasks but she has worn it in social and professional situations:

because I am a performer, it's sort of a professional necessity because otherwise, the only role I'll be called in for is wounded vet who just came home from Afghanistan. And this way, I get called in for housewife. I get called in for mom. - Archbold 2012

She notes that for her producer and fellow performers she was five weeks into a Broadway run before one of them became aware of her prosthesis. In the two-person show she developed with her husband *Jazz Hand: Tales from a One-handed Dancer* (2007), a series of linked sketches drawn from personal experience, Archbold performs with and without her prosthesis. Archbold can be seen both to be engaged in avoiding ascription of disability identity and selecting when and how she chooses to present her impairment as a part of her identity as woman and artist. In Goffman's terms she manages a possible ascription of a spoiled identity by hiding her impairment.

Barnes and Mercer (2003) remain sceptical of the application of Goffman's ideas in disability research. They aver that this approach privileges examination of the process of adaptation or management by the person stigmatised to meet standards of 'normalcy' over examination of processes of stigmatisation, constructions of normality and the forces that sustain these (Barnes and Mercer 2003:6-8). In other words they allege that Goffman considers how a disabled person might operate to best advantage by adaptation to a given social ordering rather than challenging the nature of its structures.

What Archbold can be seen to do in *One-handed dancer* is to address both these discrediting attitudes towards her body and to expose her own habitual strategies to escape such attitudes. She draws upon her understanding of both sets of attitudes and experiences in the service of her art thus choosing to lay claim to an identity as a disabled artist.

She brings into conscious awareness the nature and determinants for these strategies. Archbold is clear that her prosthetic limb offers no functional

advantage. She considers domestic settings when she simply leaves the arm off and other intimate encounters at social events and in the bedroom, where she has both worn the prosthesis to disguise the form of her non-normate body and diverted attention away from the artificial nature of the arm.

Her effective strategies can be seen as both inventive and ingenious taken into account what is apparently valued in the ordering of the dance world and representing a degree of internalisation of a particular social order. She touches on the extent to which the strategies move from a conscious choice to being a part of how she habitually operates in the world.

Archbold notes how when, preparing for a public event, her wedding, she became conscious of the fact that she was planning to wear the prosthesis despite the fact that all attendees not only knew of its existence but had also seen her regularly without it. Her use of arm and disguise became in effect second nature below the limen of consciousness.

### **3.9 Disability as a Positive identity and Claimed Identity: an Affirmative Model**

The artist and disability scholar Colin Cameron notes that in the encounter between disabled and non-disabled person the ascription of a negative disabled identity, has consequences for both parties. The ascription of a disabled identity:

Validates the subject position of being normal or non-disabled by invalidating the lived experience of impairment in terms, which mean that this can only be experienced as personal tragedy. Cameron 2012:6

He considers how an individual may lay claim to a disabled identity with a more positive valence. Cameron explores individual and collective narratives that support the development of positive disabled identities and roles both as disabled people and as artists (2011). He builds on an affirmative model of

disability first formulated by two other scholars, John Swain and Sally French (2000).

Cameron's version of disabled identity maintains the social model's separation of the concepts of impairment and disability (2011). For Cameron, impairment represents physical, sensory, emotional and cognitive difference 'to be expected and respected on its own terms' (2011:1). These, he argues, are variations to be both celebrated and accommodated by others as well as a potential source for artistic and personal expression. For Cameron this impaired body is not an extraordinary body but one variant amongst what should be deemed the ordinary. Cameron's model allows for an impairment to be an important part of who someone is (2008) and to be a valued and valuable resource for the artist's creative process.

Like Liz Crow, Cameron attests to the liberatory impact of the social model on his own thinking and practice, that of other disabled artists and for other disabled people viewing their work (Cameron 2011, 2007a). He notes both moments of epiphany when the social model is experienced as an alternative way of giving meaning to experience but also the reality of on-going struggles, involved in developing such positive identities and narratives:

Identifying as disabled is not a decision that means that suddenly somehow everything is all right, but involves a new understanding of the relationship between the impaired self and the physical and social contexts in which the impaired self is located. It makes possible different stories. - Cameron 2012:8

In reporting his detailed interviews with a range of disabled people (2011), Cameron highlights the extent to which individual agency and individual perceptions, beliefs and aspirations, surrounding what is possible are shaped by social constructions of disability and in turn may shape those constructions. For Cameron the process of developing an affirmative identity as an individual disabled person and for disabled people as a group requires reflection and unpacking the nature and extent to which a person's understanding, beliefs and everyday engagement with others have been shaped over time. In

particular it involves development of an understanding of how personal attitudes, tastes and possibilities have been shaped in everyday encounters through living in the world as a disabled person and have become internalised as what he terms a 'distinctive disability habitus' (Cameron 2011:31).

Cameron takes the concept of habitus from Bourdieu who describes habitus as an 'acquired system of generative dispositions' (Bourdieu 1977: 95) within which individuals think that their preferences and tastes are obvious, natural and taken-for-granted. Bourdieu suggests that in the everyday world individuals are not typically reflexive about their dispositions, because:

when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a "fish in water": it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted . . . It is because this world has produced me, because it has produced the categories of thought that I apply to it, that it appears to me as self-evident'. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 127–8

Habitus in this sense may be termed a way of operating and anticipating the range of possible responses by others. It is a way of operating that allows for individuals to find variations and innovations in their practices but its scope is nevertheless shaped and limited by dominant beliefs and conceptions of disability, a social system that has become internalised, inscribed both on cognitive processes and on the use of body itself.

The term habitus, can be seen to contain within it what in everyday language refers to the acquisition of habits, and indeed habitual ways of moving as with the habitual practice of a particular set of dance techniques. What Bourdieu can be seen to highlight is that these habits, and the acquisition of these specific dance techniques, are linked to affects and meanings in ways that lie below the limen of consciousness and linked to the particular fields or worlds in which they are acquired be it be it family, community or field of practice such as dance,

Cameron points out that the formation of a disabled habitus is a durational

process, formed in everyday encounters with others and involves:

absorption of dominant ways of thinking about disability, [that] involves an acceptance (which can be either passive or reluctant) of the view that this is just the way things are....While aspects of experience may be sensed by the disabled individual as unfair and unjust, possession of the disabled habitus confirms that at least they make sense. - Cameron 2011:31

Cameron can be seen to suggest that exposing and reworking attitudes, beliefs and ways of operating constructed over a long period will take time to dismantle precisely because these have come to lie below the limen of conscious awareness. If we look particularly at the disabled dance artist then what might be involved for the formation of this positive identity for disabled artists might involve a self- analysis, the revaluing of his or her body, the social structures of the everyday world in which the artist lives and the artistic field with which the artist wishes to engage.

Identity formation would require a reflexive process engaged in unpacking and a reworking of what Bourdieu (2000[1997]: 172) describes an 'inscription of social structures on bodies' in order to seek and to maintain a position of prominence and respect within the dance world. When an individual disabled artist seeks to establish a role, identity and respected position as a choreographer this might involve identification of the ways in which social structures have become entangled in an individual's personal desires and aspirations.

### **3.10 Untangling the Social and the Personal, Pierre Bourdieu the Dancer and the Dance**

Loïc Wacquant, a close collaborator and interpreter of Bourdieu's work avers that central to Bourdieu's conception of what drives human interactions is the desire of each human being to gain dignity in the eye of others and cites Bourdieu's own published words:

For only by being granted a name, a place, a function, within a group or institution can the individual hope to escape the contingency, finitude, and ultimate absurdity of existence. Human beings become such by submitting to the judgement of others, this major principle of uncertainty and insecurity but also, and without contradiction, of certainty, assurance, consecration.

Bourdieu cited in Wacquant 1998: 2.

Bourdieu does not provide an analysis of disability but what he does offer is a view of how individuals seek to establish and maintain their positions in relation to others in different social spaces, within a range of coexisting social worlds or fields each with its inner logic in relation to the particular stakes and resources valued within that arena.

Bourdieu (1985:728) notes that:

The social world is, to a large extent, what the agents make of it, at each moment; but they have no chance of unmaking it and re-making it except on the basis of realistic knowledge of what it is and what they can do from the position they occupy within it. - Bourdieu 1985: 728.

Bourdieu, in a series of published conversations with the Sociologist Loïc Wacquant that pre-dates Cameron's work identified a process of reflection that can teach us that:

we are the ones who endow the situation with part of the potency it has over us, [and] allows us to alter our perception of the situation and thereby our reaction to it. - Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 136.

Bourdieu conceived of these worlds as sites of social interaction between social actors to which he applies the term *field*<sup>28</sup>. Within any given field, religious, educational, academic, village, community, or artistic there is a structure of sometimes stated but often unstated rules and values, *doxa* or

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<sup>28</sup> For a helpful over view of how Bourdieu's engagement with his concept of field see Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:17-18.

beliefs, that impact on the relative positioning of people within a particular field. Doxa indicates a 'particular point of view, the point of view of the dominant, which presents and imposes itself as a universal point of view' (Bourdieu 1998:57).

Bourdieu suggests that, within a particular field, individuals are bound together by a tacit knowledge of its structures, how the field operates and how others operate within that field. He suggests that structures are internalised, and link to objective structuring in ways that create an illusion of an unquestioning and 'immediate understanding' of the world in which an individual is engaging (Bourdieu 200:26). This tacit knowledge coincides with the objective structures creating an illusion that certain experiences are self-evident and not open to question (Bourdieu 1990: 25-27). This sense of knowing what the world is, and how others will respond within it, shapes how an individual seeks to gain or maintain a place within the structures of a particular field.

If we look at Cameron's example together with Bourdieu's ideas, we can start to think of fields dominated by an underlying ideology of normality and beliefs about what constitutes a normal body or a normal dancing body.

Disabled individuals may compete for places within a particular field but these possible positions will remain limited both by the structures of the field and those internalised by an individual. It is only by opening up to scrutiny underlying sets of beliefs around normality. Laying open to question both how the field's structure is shaped by these beliefs together, and how understanding of how these beliefs have been internalised that different possibilities allowing different positions for disabled people become realisable.

Bourdieu uses the analogy of a game to illustrate his thinking:

In a game, the field (pitch or board on which it is played), the rules the outcome, the stake etc. is clearly seen for what it is, an arbitrary social construct, an artefact whose arbitrariness and artificiality, are underlined by everything that defines its autonomy-explicit and specific rules, strictly delimited. - Bourdieu 1990:66



That realistic knowledge he presents as a *sens pratique*<sup>29</sup>, a feel for the game where a player can act, plan, and respond in anticipation of the moves and responses others will use. As players or social actors in a field there is a tacit sharing of the rules stated and unstated but shared. Bourdieu argues that the social and political fields or worlds in which an individual operates are fields we may enter into at birth, (family), engage with as citizens (social and political) engage us for long periods in our lives as citizens, in education as well as in our careers (the arts, the academy, the military and factories and offices).

The stakes, or goal for which individuals compete in other fields of endeavour represent what is seen as of value within a particular field. Within any particular field individuals are positioned in powerful or less powerful relationships in relation to what forms of capital are most valued in that field.

Bourdieu extends the term 'capital' as a resource with exchange value between people within particular fields of endeavour to encompass not only money or economic capital, but also 'cultural capital' (understanding and competence in cultural relations) and 'social capital' (networks of influential people or institutions that can be drawn on for support) (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:118-120). In a discussion with Wacquant, Bourdieu, refers to these as three 'fundamental species each with its own subtypes' incorporating actual and virtual resources open to transformation into 'symbolic capital' through perceptions of the 'logic' of their value in different fields (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 119). The kind of capital valued within a particular field of endeavour may vary from field to field.

An example of what forms of symbolic capital may dominate in a field of dance can be seen in recent sociological studies of the Royal Ballet Company in London conducted by three sociologists, Claire Williams, Steven Wainwright and Bryan Turner. They identify two major forms physical or corporeal capital, and artistic capital (Wainwright et al 2006:539). They employ 'physical capital' to cover both the performer's fleshy body and its

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<sup>29</sup> For an overview of Bourdieu's conception of a logic of practice see Bourdieu 2000:80-97)

competencies and technical abilities. They describe a process where the dancer's physical capital is invested and transformed in combination with artistic capital, (embodied cultural knowledge) to produce performance work imbued with symbolic capital i.e. of perceived value and prestige (Wainwright et al 2006:539).

If certain public fields define physical capital in ideal or normate form as the non-disabled body, then, within those fields, someone with a visibly impaired body will find it difficult to acquire sufficient physical capital to establish their value and prestige to parallel those with normate bodies. If the dance field does not shift from a view of corporeal capital and artistic capital as based on a particular normate dancing body then it becomes hard for disabled artists to find positions where their performance work is valued in the eyes of others.

The ways in which people are grouped and positioned in a field whether as men or women, disabled or non-disabled, working class or upper class may, at the extremes, involve the exercise of real violence<sup>30</sup>. Bourdieu uses the term *symbolic violence*<sup>31</sup>, an idea he first develops in relation to educational fields in considering how groups of people are pushed into certain positions within social or political fields and societies. It is a construct that can be seen to incorporate many of the issues to do with measurement, expectation and cultural images and representations discussed so far in relation to disabled people.

As Cameron later echoes, Bourdieu is not suggesting that people deliberately accept this position or social ordering, nor do those non-disabled people who believe they are acting with good will and intent as audience, teachers or colleagues in different social worlds. This ordering, these expectations of how others will respond become incorporated until it no longer becomes a matter for overt consideration and people are left with the sense that this is just the way it is.

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<sup>30</sup> For an overview of violent crime against disabled people in the UK and beyond see EHRC (2009) and Hughes et al (2012)

<sup>31</sup> See Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) for detailed expositions of the complexity of this construct in Bourdieu's thinking used initially to consider phenomena in educational fields Bourdieu and Passeron 1977

Agents apply to objective structures of the social world structures of perception and appreciation which are issued out of these very structures and which tend to picture the world as evident.

Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:168n123.

What Bourdieu is pointing towards is that social ordering becomes part of inner imaging. It is not, as in Foucault's idea of the disciplining overseer, simply a way in which we discipline and scrutinise, conduct or feel compelled to manage our bodies. We are born into or acquire this knowledge of where we are positioned in the world in encounters with others (Bourdieu: 2004:84-110). Gradually, and over time, we develop ways of thinking, moving, and engaging in the world; habitual ways of operating similar to those discussed by Cameron in his conception of a disability habitus.

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* refers to an embodied practical knowledge of possibilities produced within a particular social world or field. It is a practical knowledge that becomes so engrained that it seems a natural part of the individual and incorporates the possible responses of others within that particular field. In a much-quoted passage he suggests that:

when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a 'fish in water': it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted. - Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 127.

It is also a phenomenon that becomes written on the fleshy body, how we move, speak, our experiences of that body, how we imagine it, what we choose to do and desire. Archbold's habitual way of presenting her body in anticipation of possible responses by others becomes effectively habitual and part of what Bourdieu would refer to as her bodily hexis:

Bodily hexis is political mythology realised, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking and thereby of feeling and thinking. Bourdieu 1997: 92-94

Bodily hexis, as conceptualised by Bourdieu can be seen to describe a process of sedimentation of ideas that shape the body. The worlds in which

we grow up, and within which we engage as adults, subtly shape the ways in which we present our selves to others. These bodily practices, ways of speaking standing and moving are entwined with a range of affects and meanings.

If these practices are shaped by particular values and ideas within an individual family, group or wider field then it follows that they offer the potential for recognising practices in others that suggest a similarity of experience.

Bodily hexis functions both to structure our sense of self and others but also can be seen to have the potential to structure our relationships with each other. Bourdieu offers an example from his own experience that suggests that what he is trying to describe is not just a question of recognising a gesture or accent that suggests a commonality of experience.

Bourdieu (2007:26-30) reflects upon the values underpinning the family and village he grew up in, the world of elite institutions at school and university within which he trained and the ways, could be seen to shape his ways of operating within the French world of intellectuals and the ideas he pursued. He ponders on how these earlier experiences may have shaped the considerable emotional force that seemed to lie behind his antipathies to particular intellectuals and their ideas (2007:22-23).

Bourdieu also raises the surprising affinities that drew him to work with individuals who did not share his intellectual ideas but who turned out on further acquaintance to share as similarity of background in their working class origins and shared experiences of operating with an elite academic field working class backgrounds operating within elite worlds (2007: 26-28).

Here Bourdieu is concerned with the enduring nature of habitus within the structure of the academic field but he is also hinting at shifts and some changes over time. He writes of an academic field where a working class man may engage and find a position of prominence. Bourdieu demonstrates how, in his own practices and that of other, the ways in which their work and ideas may contribute to shifts in structure allowing opportunities for engagement by other working class scholars and indeed activists.

Turning to the arts, Bourdieu suggests that these too may be considered social fields in which social actors are engaged, with their ways of engagement underpinned by particular logics of practice (Bourdieu 1987, 2002). Those who seek to enter, to find a position and to operate within that field have to engage with its underlying values, and the ways in which these shape encounters with others.

Bourdieu contends that, when considering emergent art forms or particular works it is easy to slip into an ahistorical framework that fails to take notice of significant shifts and disjunctions that may have occurred over time within the structure of a particular art field. He notes that

We use the same lexicon of aesthetic expression, 'creation', creator', etc., to speak of Piero della Francesca, or of Pissaro and Munch. But in fact there are extraordinary discontinuities - Bourdieu 2002:93

The danger for Bourdieu is that we 'overlook the genesis, not of the character of the artist or the writer, but of the *space* in which this character can exist' (2002: 93). In other words where can the art appear, how does it come to be accepted as art within the values and pre-occupations of a particular field of art at a particular time in history?

Bourdieu here is less concerned with the work of art or the artist, than the social and historical conditions under which they may be practicing. What he does offer for the purposes of this thesis is a way of thinking about historical changes in the space and field of dance and other artistic fields and how these may impact on the place of a disabled artist.

Bourdieu points to two key aspects in his approach (Bourdieu 1998v.ii). Firstly 'the relational', meaning how individuals relate to each other and to groups within a social space or field. Secondly the relationships between the 'potentialities inscribed in the body of agents', by which he means people as social agents, and 'the structure of the situations where they act'(vii). He suggests that those in more privileged positions are as much entwined in these complex and intricate relationships, as are those ranked lower in the field (Bourdieu 1998:34).

This chapter has discussed ways of conceptualising disability and impairment, both historically and in the twenty first century. Whatever definition is used, and whether a person is born with or acquires major impairments, these impairments are likely to be linked with lower social status and inequitable access to resources.

Bourdieu's ideas suggest a need to examine differences within the field of dance itself and the possibility that the way we think about dance or values with which the disabled artist may engage may also shift over time. Over time shifts in fields can occur and new fields of art may emerge. We can move from his ideas of social structures that 'inscribe potentialities' on the body to consider Cameron's disability habitus and what may be involved in a rethinking and experiencing of what those 'potentialities' might be as well as the structures that contribute to that habitus.

The next chapter turns to how an ideology of normality may be perpetuated in complex ways but may also be challenged.

## **4 Disability Arts: The Disabled Artist and Representations of Disability**

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of cultural representations of disability and their function in literary and public discourses. It then moves to consider the actual presence of deaf and disabled artists and the potential rise of Disability Arts as a distinctive artistic field in UK arts. An examination of how disabled people occupy public spaces in the US and UK is then provided to offer a historical overview that draws on various modes of public spectacle, in particular the side show and freak show. In doing so, consideration is given to different modes of critical analysis and their appropriateness for discussing artist intention and execution of creative work.

The chapter takes up questions of artistry, form and subject matter in the arts drawing on debates that emerged in US dance in the 1930s and current debates within Disability Arts. The discussion then moves to a consideration of the development of deaf and disabled artists in the twentieth century. It addresses questions of support and the exercise of choices that can allow these artists to pursue both questions of disability and impairment and a range of themes in their creative work.

### **4.1 The Presence of Disability**

It is one matter to argue that the existence of a bodily impairment should not be a central issue in deciding the worth or work of the person involved. It is another to leave the existence of that impairment as an unremarked aspect of someone's biography. American cultural theorists (Davis 2002, 1995; Norden 1994; Snyder and Mitchell 2006) draw attention to a long list of writers (Davis 1995:7), artists and film directors (Norden 1994:4) whose bodily impairments remain largely unremarked in analysis of their work and careers.

Davis (1995:8) argues that where attention is drawn to such impairments in writers and artists or public figures it is usually bound within a narrative of heroic triumph over disability or the result of an exceptional creative genius.

Where it is not remarked upon, for example in public figures in eighteenth century England and America it raises the possibility that perhaps 'a physical impairment was not judged important to the ability to perform in public office' during a particular historical period (Davis 1995:9). It is not clear whether a similar inference can be made when considering the ability of the artist.

Davis reviews a range of recent studies (2002:52-53) that explore the use of the terms 'deformity' and 'monstrosity' prior to the eighteenth century. These suggest that aesthetic judgments were conjoined with moral judgments. 'Beauty' and perfection of form is typically equated with virtue and 'deformity', with distortion of character and a sign of divine punishment and marking of the body. Davis argues that this persists even when the origins of 'deformity' are detached from assumptions of divine causes. He refers to the 16<sup>th</sup> century rationalist, Francis Bacon who writes of 'deformity' as a natural variation in human form but nevertheless, Davis argues, this variation is seen as an inevitable and malign 'cause of personality and behaviour' (2002: 53).

In Bacon's essay *On Deformity*, he muses:

Whosoever hath fixed in his person that that doth induce contempt, hath also a perpetual spur in himself to deliver himself from scorn; therefore all deformed persons are exceeding bold; first as to their own defence, as being exposed to scorn, but in process of time by a general habit... it layeth in their competitors and emulators asleep, as never believing they should be in possibility of advancement till they see them in possession: so that upon the matter, in a great wit, deformity is an advantage to rising. - Bacon 2010/1625: unpagged

Bacon adds:

The ground is that they will, if they be of spirit, seek to free themselves from scorn: which must be either by virtue or malice; and therefore, let it not be marvelled if sometimes they prove excellent persons.  
- Bacon 2010/1625: unpagged



Bacon adds a list of prominent figures including Socrates who might be considered both 'deformed' and people of standing and virtue, 'excellent persons' (2010:inpagd). Davis' reading may be modified to consider that Bacon also offers an early reflection on the impact of the 'disabling' imaginings of others and of agency. This experience becomes, in Bacon's account, a 'spur' to action by those looked upon 'with aversion' and leads to an active engagement that draws on their individual capacities and talents to shift their standing in the world and in the eyes of others.

Davis is one of a number of American scholars of cultural history and form (Snyder and Mitchell 1997, 2006; Davidson 2008) concerned with representations of disability in western art where disability is employed as a signifier both of extreme emotions and of extremities of human experience. Mitchell and Snyder (2000), for example, writing within the field of critical literary criticism, have produced a complex theory of what they identify as a pervasive use of disability characterization and imagery in cultural forms. For them disability as a trope (as opposed the reality of bodily impairments) is a matter of cultural representation and performs the role of what they term a 'narrative prosthesis' that:

situates the experience and representational life of disability upon the ironic grounding of an unsteady rhetorical stance. In a literal sense prosthesis seeks to accomplish an illusion. A body deemed lacking, unfunctional or inappropriately functional needs compensation, and prosthesis helps to effect this end. Yet the prosthesizing of the body or a rhetorical figure carries with it an ideological assumption about what is aberrant. The judgment that a mechanism is faulty is already profoundly social. Mitchell and Snyder 2000:6

Mitchell and Snyder speak both to actual prostheses, crutch, chair, or artificial limb, and what they deem 'textual' prostheses that serve to ensure that 'disability does not fall too far from an acceptable norm' (2000:7). In both senses for Mitchel and Snyder:

a prosthetic intervention seeks to accomplish an erasure of difference altogether; yet, failing that, as is always the case with prosthesis, the minimal goal is to return one to an acceptable degree of difference.

- Mitchel and Snyder 2007:7-8

Cultural historians have also begun to look beyond representations and use of disability by non-disabled artists to consider the work and presence of deaf and disabled artists, in other words cultural productions where deaf and disabled artists are the producers of work. The cultural theorist Michael Davidson (2008) looks at a range of disabled artists and their work in his book *Concerto for the Left Hand: Disability and the Defamiliar Body*. He draws attention to how these artists may have approached the concept of disability or impairment. Davidson, throughout his study argues that the artists' embodied experiences of impairment may not only impact on the form and nature of the work but also have the capacity to illuminate how aspects of all bodies may be rendered both familiar and unfamiliar.

Snyder (2005) considers how work created through the perspective of a disabled artist may also act as counter-narrative to other representations of disability within the chosen artistic form at that period. The focus of her analysis is the text of *The Deformed Unformed* (1824) a play written by Lord Byron (1788-1824) and that remained unfinished at the time of his death in 1824 (Snyder 2005). She considers how Lord Byron's experience of his own bodily impairments (now seen as almost certainly a form of cerebral palsy), and the attitudes of others towards him, are central to both theme and form in his play.

At the beginning of the play, 'Byron positions the "deformed" Arnold as innocuous in his social setting' (Snyder 2005: 274). The central character Arnold is abused by his mother in terms that draw on those thrown at Shakespeare's *Richard III* by his mother. Snyder suggests that attention here is drawn not to a conflation of evil and 'deformity' as in productions of *Richard III* at Byron's time, and that emphasised Richard's mother's words as knowledge gained in the family about the moral character of her son and supporting a view:

that Richard's 'deformed' outside mirrors an equally malignant interior life. In contrast, *The Deformed Transformed* uses the mother's figure as a representative of the injustice that compromises Arnold's life in a denigrated social body. - Snyder 2005:273

The effect of the hostile words and their impact on his self-image creates despair in Arnold. It is a despair that drives him almost to suicide. Here, unlike in *Richard III*, the link between 'deformity' malignity and lack of power is challenged. Arnold exchanges his body with a character named Stranger who offers Arnold the body and role of the Greek hero, Achilles. In that role Arnold faces a war that exposes the complexities of this ideal masculine role, body and character. In an inversion of the images of the time it is the Stranger, now in the disabled body that was Arnold's, and not the man closest to an ideal image of masculine beauty, who woos and wins Olympia, daughter of the Pope (Snyder 2005: 274-282).

As the work was not performed there can be no account of its reception and meaning for audiences of the period. Snyder's reading of the text, however, suggest an early use of inversions or challenge to contemporary narratives and representations of normative, ideal or non-normate bodies.

A number of the writers discussed so far have identified the work of individual disabled writers and poets from the past. There is not as yet a comprehensive account that documents the growing number of disabled performers on the contemporary theatrical stage in Britain or the United States nor the changing conditions that allow for this development.

## **4.2 Documenting the Work of Disabled Artists**

A number of scholars and practitioners have begun to document and to discuss the work of individual disabled artists working in particular genres and consider links to social and cultural shifts that may facilitate the work. Garland-Thomson documents the work of twentieth and twenty-first century artists who work within the fields of live art and performance art (2009, 2000). She, and a growing number of disability scholars, have also turned

their attention to the long and complex histories of exposure of and performance by, people with extra-ordinary bodies presented for the paying and viewing public as objects of novelty and curiosity (Durbach 2010; Garland-Thomson 1996a, 1996b; Bogdan 1988; Fiedler 1978).

There is considerable controversy in the emerging literature as to whether this was solely a history of exploitation and commodification, or, whether performers could be seen as exercising a degree of agency and choice them.<sup>32</sup> Were the participants of exploitation or working class people, seeking employment as performers, and indeed artist? Were these performers in the sideshows and exhibition spaces that became collectively known as freak Shows, finding gainful employment preferable to them to the limited range of other work available to them?

It can be argued that what is being discussed represents both an example of structures and practices shaped by contemporary views of the normal and abnormal body and also consider how performers engage with the limited possibilities it afforded them.

Garland-Thomson offers a model of spectatorship that links audiences for these early performers with the contemporary work of live art performers who make explicit use of their impaired bodies in performance, through her exploration of staring as discussed in chapter one (1.9.1.). For her, what is crucial is an examination of how both groups of artists seek to engage and/or are engaged with the curious and intrusive 'staring' of their audiences<sup>33</sup>. Disability performance art is for Garland-Thomson a:

genre of autobiography particularly appropriate to representing the social experience of disability precisely because it allows for creating both visual and narrative self-representations simultaneously and

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<sup>32</sup> For a good and balanced view of these debates around choice and agency in a particular historical context see Chemers (2008: 105-121).

<sup>33</sup> For documentation of the work of a range of performance artists who incorporate in their work both the histories of these early performers and contemporary practices of enfreakment see Kuppers (2004,2011), Millett-Gallant (2000) and Garland-Thomson (2000) for notions of enfreakment in their performances.

because it traffics in the two realms of representation fundamental to the social construction of disability identity. Garland- Thomson 2000:1

Turning specifically to the area of performance, and in particular to dance, it is difficult to find comprehensive accounts documenting the contemporary works of deaf and disabled artists. Cooper-Albright (1997) does document some work by disabled artists working within both ballet based and contemporary forms of dance and Contact Improvisation. Her analysis of the choreographer's task attends both to questions of representation and to the presence of the visible fleshy body of the dancers in late twentieth century performance in the US and UK.

Cooper-Albright's discussions are set more widely within a study of how new choreographies engage with a range of bodies which can be seen as marked by social constructions of gender, race, ethnicity and new forms of performance that combine movement, music and theatre (Cooper-Albright 1997).

Dance artist and scholar, Adam Benjamin (2002) offers a brief but useful history of the last part of the twentieth century and the emergence of professional dance artists working in the UK. This history is set within a practical manual for training that has had a significant impact on practices contributing to the professional development of disabled dance artists. His own website (Benjamin 2013) offers a mapping of emergent companies featuring the performance work of disabled dance artists providing if not an archive of work at least the assurance that their presence is not rendered invisible<sup>34</sup>.

Benjamin points out the influence upon disabled artists of two parallel developments in Europe, the UK, and the US upon disabled dancers

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<sup>34</sup> In 2013 The Foundation for Community Dance and Gloucester Dance coordinated several meetings as a preliminary stage in establishing a National Inclusive Dance Network to co-ordinate information and development in the field. Prior to that FCD established a mentoring programme for disabled choreographers and a National Alliance for Deaf and Disabled Artists.

(Benjamin 1995 2002: 29-42, 2010: 118). The first is community dance as a form that supports the principle of an artistic expression open to all. The second concerns shifts within dance forms and practices such as the increasing use of a combination of various art forms (music, film, written and spoken text, and theatre) and movement genres that extend what may be considered as dance performance. Here Benjamin can be seen as addressing a professional world of dance performance and in particular dance as an art form that has the capacity to engage with the breadth and depth of human experience.

In the early 1990s Benjamin, together with Celeste Dandeker co-founded Candoco Dance Company, a professional contemporary dance company of disabled and non-disabled dancers. From its inception the company can be seen to have engaged both with issues of access to dance at a community dance level and with the professional field of dance performance. Candoco has developed an educational and development role for disabled artists, both amateur and those looking to work professionally both directly through workshops and courses and indirectly in collaborations with dance training organisations.<sup>35</sup>

By 2013 the Candoco company website describes it as a professional company that had over twenty years consolidated a 'presence on the mainstream middle scale touring circuit in the UK and internationally'. In other words positioned within a mainstream world of professional art or theatre dance. The 2013 website speaks of the company's intention to produce and to present 'high quality, innovative works by disabled and non-disabled dancers' (Candoco 2013). It commissions work from choreographers within the contemporary dance field with the aim of creating works that 'excite, challenge and broaden perceptions of art and ability (Candoco 2013).

The performance study scholar and arts practitioner Owen Smith argues that Candoco's performances have offered a 'significant challenge to the exclusive

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<sup>35</sup> In 2012, for example, Candoco was confirmed as a National Portfolio Organisation by Arts Council England which meant would receive regular funding and acknowledged both its wider professional and educational roles within the UK dance field.

corporeal aesthetic that has traditionally dominated contemporary and classical dance' (Smith 2005:76)<sup>36</sup>. Smith notes how the company's early works divided dance critics between those who viewed the works as contributing to postmodernist dance experiments extending conceptions of the body in performance (75) and those who rejected it as 'freak show (80) or 'victim art (82) (Smith 2005).

In considering these polarised responses Smith points to the ways in which Candoco's intention to place its work within 'the dominant mainstream tradition in dance' represented an important departure from other dance companies that had begun to incorporate the work of disabled dance artists (2005:75). He describes UK dance companies like Amici and Green Candle Dance as 'identified closely with community dance and a disabled arts movement' as opposed to Candoco's deliberate engagement with an established professional dance world (2005:75). By implication Smith also raises the question as to who is the intended audience for the work of the companies. All three companies can be said to be creating work that challenges pre-existing narratives and conceptualisations of disability and ability. The emergence of an identifiable field of Disability Arts in the UK allows for further reflection on where and with what effect the work of disabled artists is placed.

### **4.3 Disability Arts in the UK**

Barnes, one of the architects of the social model of disability, considers the growth of Disability Arts in the UK as part of a political project spearheaded by disabled people with a diverse range of impairments (2008). Barnes describes an intimate and complex relationship between new forms of radical political activism by disabled people, the emergence of a disability subculture of disabled people with its own values and conceptions of disabled identity and consciousness. For Barnes, Disability Arts represents an artistic expression of

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<sup>36</sup> Smith traces the historical roots of a traditional corporeal aesthetic from sixteenth to twenty first century dance (2005:76-79)

these cultural values by disabled people in a variety of cultural forms (Barnes: 2008:1-3).

Barnes (2008) can be seen to distinguish a disability culture as one where the power lies in the hands of disabled people rather than a majority culture where power to define disability and its consequences lies with non-disabled people. He argues that 'mainstream arts have not confronted disability as a socio-political question' but remain connected to representations of disability as a mark of individual failure (Barnes 2008:10).

For Barnes the development of a disability subculture offers a source of mutual support and identification with other disabled people and, linked to Disability Arts, a source of positive cultural identity (2008:10). The culture is underpinned by a shared 'acceptance of impairment as a symbol of difference rather than shame and recognition of the significance and value of a disabled lifestyle' (Barnes 2008:7).

Barnes argues that 'disabled people are often dis-empowered, if not excluded, by arts training' (2008:10). The emergence of a field of Disability Arts<sup>37</sup> then, in Barnes terms, arises partly out of the necessity for the movement to train and support its own artists. For Barnes disabled artists:

developing their art, in environment controlled by them, is seen as critical if disabled people are to develop as creative producers and compete with artists in the mainstream. Barnes 2008:10

In 2006, Paddy Masefield (1942-2012), a disability activist, theatre director, writer and a key figure in the administration of the arts, published a set of papers covering his own engagement with the rise of Disability Arts in the UK. Masefield identified the first public acknowledgment of Disability Arts as an artistic movement with the founding of the disability led London Disability Forum in 1986. Masefield's brief chronology of Disability Arts, artists and

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<sup>37</sup> He dates the emergence of Disability Arts to the later part of the twentieth century and contextualizes it within previous work by individual disabled artists (Barnes 2008:11-17).



organisations draws on a more substantial chronology developed by Allan Sutherland (2008) for the Edward Lear Foundation<sup>38</sup>.

Sutherland, a stand-up comic, writer and prominent figure in UK Disability arts for over thirty years, is clear both about what he designates as Disability Arts and its purpose, and which disabled artists can be seen as practitioners within the field. Disability Art for Sutherland is 'art made by disabled people which reflects the experience of disability' and not how it is represented by non-disabled artists (2005:1). Like Barnes Sutherland sees Disability Arts as inherently intertwined with disability politics as he explains:

I don't think that Disability Arts would have been possible without disability politics coming first. It's what makes a Disability Artist different from an artist with a disability... Our politics teach us that we are oppressed, not inferior. - Sutherland 1989: 1

In a statement of intent published on the Disability Arts Online website in 2005 Sutherland made it clear that disability arts at all levels is for him because it is:

seriously intentioned creative work - poems or painting or music or comedy or theatre or whatever - made with some aesthetic purpose neither therapy nor a hobby to keep the cripple's hands busy - Sutherland 2005:1

Sutherland appears to distinguish the disability arts practitioner from other disabled artists (such as Milton and his poem on blindness) whose disability is experienced as 'impediment'. He argues that 'Disability Arts regards the experience of disability, not as an impediment, but as an appropriate and fruitful subject for artistic work' (2005:1).

Both Masfield and Sutherland are clear about the primary audience for the work being other disabled people, thus distancing it from the concerns of other artists and companies such as Candoco Dance Company. Sutherland

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<sup>38</sup> Major funding has been obtained for a project to establish a national archive of Disability Arts practice in the UK see Pring 2013

comments that 'we don't feel that our work has to be ratified by the approval of a mainstream, able-bodied audience' and then raises questions about how to archive the work and its history (2005:2).

Both he and Masefield touch on important questions about whose work will be archived, what work will be considered worthy of preservation, and which organisations are to be documented as part of the Disability Arts' canon and history. It is clear they both adhere to the principle that administration of disability arts should be the concern of 'disability led' organisations. This they see as an important tenet linked directly with a disability activism.

In essence, their overall argument is that if a matter concerns the lives of disabled people then it is disabled people who should be in the forefront of any organisation that deals with it. This argument still leaves open the question of which people, what kinds of artists and with what kind of experience. Moreover, as the artist and disability cultural theorist, Paul Darke (2003) points out, as do others, disability-led organisations appear to have been disproportionately hit by cuts in arts funding in the UK.

Inevitably, in an era of economic restraint there are likely to be real tensions around questions about which artists and companies are to be supported by public funding and indeed which by Disability Arts' organisations. This point will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Disability Arts can be seen as a distinctive field of arts practice close to Bourdieu's conception of a field of power. It has developed its own organisations, journals and critics including the now disbanded Disability Arts Forums and the online journal Disability Arts Online. The Disability Arts activist and television producer Sian Vasey raises the question of which artists are to receive support within a field of Disability Arts. She raises the political intent of Disability Arts Forums and whether or not they should support disabled artists whose work does not directly address an emancipatory view of disability (2000:4). Elsewhere she refers to Disability Art as any kind of art executed by disabled people that:

Says something however obliquely, or however crudely, about the experience of being a disabled person, art which is the expression of disability culture. Vasey 1992:11

Her concern would seem to be more with subject matter and its value in educating or uniting disabled people rather than with developing artistic registers with which to critique the work and the way it is crafted. Sutherland, however, raises distinctions between amateur and professional and how work can be thought about and critiqued within the context of Disability Arts (Sutherland 2005:3).

#### **4.4 Disability Arts and Critical Registers**

Aaron Williamson, a deaf performance artist prominent in the Disability Arts field, identifies a lack of a critical attitude towards the work of professional disabled artists. He cites this as a problem both from within the Disability Arts community and from out with it (2012: unpagged). He suggests that the apparent reluctance of mainstream art critics in 2012 to engage in serious critical analysis of the work can be compared with that of a period of 'critical silence' by a 'predominantly white art establishment' with regards to the 'emergence of Black Art in the 1980s' (Williamson 2012 unpagged).

Williamson (2012:unpagged distinguishes between different usages of the term 'mainstream'. In Disability Arts it is used simply means not part of the field and a wider use within other fields of art where it implies innovative and emergent art forms. Williamson goes further in suggesting a paucity of critical engagement from within the disability arts field:

Supporting the 'culture of celebration' represented by much Disability Arts is the almost total absence of criticism of it. It is as if criticism is forbidden and – even on otherwise excellent journals such as *Disability Arts Online* – a bad review or even a constructive 'negative' one is hard to find. Thus, Disability Arts as a tradition may be in danger of stagnation through being entirely uncritical of itself. The intrinsic problem being that if the weakness of certain art works cannot

be identified, nor can the strengths and achievements of others. -  
Williamson 2012: unpagged

Williamson and Sutherland raise are questions both about creative form and about practice. For Williamson there is an absence of rigorous criticism that forces disability artists to 'take risks and to oppose cultural complacency' and fails to consider whether any work is sufficiently 'complex and compelling enough to gain widespread and lasting critical worth' (Williamson 2012: unpagged).

What both Sutherland and Williamson are identifying is, in effect, questions concerning the use of art as propaganda and as a tool of political activism. Can art works that aim to educate, raise political consciousness, and create a sense of solidarity among disabled people and their allies, also engage with questions of quality form and aesthetic considerations and the artistry and skill of an individual performer? Can critical appraisal pay attention both to political content and the crafting of an artwork?

These are not new question in dance. Dance artist and scholar Mark Franko considers the links between the politics of organised labour in the US in the depression years of the 1930s, concerns with inequalities based on class and race and a range of US dance practices during the 1930s (1995,2002). In his overview of what Franko terms a 'revolutionary dance movement', nurtured by the Worker's Dance League, he draws attention to debates around the expression of radical political ideas through existing and new dance practices and the links between art and propaganda (1995: 25-37)<sup>39</sup>.

During this period questions were being raised about the intended audience for the work and its content. Debates focused around who might participate as performer, the place of the skill and artistry of individual dancer, and the relationship between political ideas and dance vocabulary, movement and form. This 'radical dance' sought to cultivate a specific 'proletarian audience' of workers to educate, rally and inspire (Franko 2002:11). In the 1930s a

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<sup>39</sup> Franko offers an appendix where he reproduces a selection of writing on modern dance from a left wing perspective published in *New Theatre*, *New Masses*, and *Daily Worker* between 1929 to 1937 (1995:109 -144)

‘mass dance movement’ blurred distinctions between amateur and professional dance performer and created an infrastructure of classes and group performances but demanded a political consciousness and awareness from all participants (Franko 2002: 23-29).

The US dance artist Jane Dudley (1912-2001)<sup>40</sup> participated both within the sphere of radical dance as performer teacher, choreographer and founder of the New Dance Group and as a performer and choreographer within the wider arena of the emergent modern dance movement. In an interview with Franko, Dudley identifies the problems involved in finding and developing artistic means’ of expressing political ideas ‘and the danger that the ideas might end up as ‘more important than the expression (Dudley cited in Franko 2002:58).

The 1930s was for Franko a period when dance forms and performance practices succeeded in transmitting to an audience feelings that resonated with the everyday social and political experiences of everyday life of working people in the Great Depression (2002:9). It is not only content but also forms of expression that were important.

For Franko it is the ways in which expressive form resonated with everyday experience that drew audiences of working people not only to overtly radical dance but also to other forms of modern dance during the 1930s (2002:54). Franko’s examples from this period demonstrate alliances between dance and politics. As he says ‘dance does not become political only when the choreographer adopts politically legible content; the cultural politics of dance are always embedded in form’ (Franko 2002:57).

Williamson speaks from the context of a disability politics and Disability Arts about raises questions similar to those of Franko’s. For Williamson, as both commentator and artist, there is a need to search for new forms and the potential re-visioning and extension of existing aesthetic forms by disabled artists. He argues that artists need to address audiences outside of what he terms a ‘Disability Arts ghetto’ (Williamson 2011: unpagged).

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<sup>40</sup> Dudley was one of the founders of the London Contemporary Dance School in 1970. Her own roots lay in German expressionist dance, and she performed with the performed with the Martha Graham Company.

Williamson describes his own arts practice as 'inspired by my experience of becoming deaf and by a politicised, yet humorous sensibility towards disability' (2011:unpaged). The form he looks to is that of performance art and, in particular its early manifestations in the 1960s and 1970s. Williamson remains sceptical about the value of contemporary dance as an art form for disability artists. For him it remains:

problematic since the aestheticisation of athletic or gymnastic movement performed by idealised bodies (i.e. strong and fit) is indubitably a major objective of dance as an art form. - Williamson 2010:13

Williamson captures these objections in his *Damaged Dance* (2009), a mock documentary that satirises inclusive dance practices that aim to include disabled artists within contemporary dance. Elsewhere, Williamson (2010) offers an interesting exception to his objections to dance as a medium for disability artists by focusing on the work of Raimund Hoghe, a German choreographer and dance performer.

Williamson points to Hoghe's use of ritual as containing elements of performance art and to his development of a movement form that draws directly from Hoghe's own physicality. He argues that Hoghe's use of his visibly impaired body as part of the work places him within the central values and aims of a Disability Art. For Williamson, Hoghe presents his body in performance as neither inferior nor strange but simply it 'is just what it is' and thus falls within the political values of Disability Art. (2010:13).

Hoghe himself resists the inclusion of his work within the canon of Disability Arts:

I'm not in the context of Disability Theater. This corner, I don't want to be in this corner. I'm always against corners. - Hoghe cited in Barker 2012

Hoghe seeks to place his art firmly within a dance form allowing for the possibility that it may challenge both ideas about the human body in performance and the dance form itself. As Hoghe states 'I work with trained dancers. They move to music in space, so why shouldn't it be called dance?' (Hoghe cited in Seaver 2010). Hoghe's work can be seen to meet Williamson's aim of 'challenging cultural complacency' and evokes serious, and often sharply divided, critical responses both to the nature of Hoghe's long durational works and his physicality as performer<sup>41</sup>.

Hoghe's work engages with story telling within a minimalist aesthetic. As he commented:

I am not interested in virtuosity. For me very little movement can have a big effect. I want to share the quality of the dancers and the music with the audience. - Hoghe cited in Marranca 2010

Like the dancers of the 1930s Hoghe can be seen to seek forms of expression that speak directly to his audience members and their emotional and everyday experiences in the world in which they live.

Hoghe makes deliberate use of singularity and difference and explores this in his choice of co-performers. The contrasts in movement and physicality between performers are used by Hoghe to consider not just binaries of disability/non-disability, but also those of gender, sexuality, race, youth and age, culture and, the spaces and positions in between<sup>42</sup>.

Hoghe's works both draw upon, and challenges, a range of dance forms and aesthetics<sup>43</sup> Hoghe can therefore at one level be considered a disabled artist who explores disability. He is also a dance artist who chooses to address a wide variety of themes within the art form in ways where his own physicality

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<sup>41</sup> See for example review's of a performance of Hoghe's *Sacre-Rite of Spring* in London 2007 ranging from positive and critical acclaim<sup>2</sup>Roy; 2007; and negative comment on both the work and Hoghe's physicality in relation to dance Gilbert 2007.

<sup>42</sup> A good overview of Hoghe's body of work be found in an edited collection of papers by a range of critics and dance scholars (Connolly 2013)

<sup>43</sup> He both incorporates and challenges, for example, aspects of the work and practice of the dance theatre of the German artist Pina Bausch (1940-2009) for whom Hoghe worked as dramaturg.

and experiences of living in a potentially disabled world are simply one of a variety of resources upon which he may draw. He uses the history and significance of his own body in his autobiographical solo *Chambre Séparée* (1997) that touches on his own history as a gay man born with a physical impairment in 1950s Germany. In this and two other linked works, *Meinwärts* (1994) and *Another Dream* (2000) Hoghe explores conceptions of beauty and prejudice in the twentieth century.

These explorations include the historical consequences of Nazi aesthetic and political conceptions of racial purity and bodily ideals. During the period in which the Nazis were in power, the dominance of these values would have led not simply to Hoghe's exclusion from the theatrical stage but also to his death, to an execution dictated by the twin facts that he was both a disabled person and a gay man.

In other works Hoghe's interest as a choreographer in the singularity of his co-performers extends not only to their different performance trainings or individual histories. His choreographic practice draws upon what is visible in their performing bodies, elements of gender, age or ethnicity and their significance for a viewing audience together with different dance forms.

In this sense Hoghe can be seen to draw on the experience of living in the world as a disabled person as an experience that shapes his creative curiosity in the different lived and embodied experiences of other performers. A critical appreciation of Hoghe's work practices may draw both on perspectives informed by Disability Arts practice and from those informed by wider contemporary dance and performance practices.

Hoghe works with the visible presence of contrasting bodies. Reflecting upon the presence of disabled dancers on the aesthetic stage, Kuppers suggests that 'disabled dancers can challenge what it means to dance every time they take the stage' (2001:39). What Hoghe's work raises is the question both of the nature of the challenge to existing conceptions of dance and what he brings not only as a performer but also as choreographer.



## 4.5 Disability Arts and Arts and Disability

Elsewhere, Kuppers raises the question of context when considering what critical register is to be employed when analysing the work of disabled artists (2011:10). She cites the example of her viewing of the work of the dancer Rodney Bell<sup>44</sup> and her approach to his performances placed within a political Disability Arts context or a wider field of dance (Kuppers 2011:10-13). The latter prompts her to base her assessment on considerations of aesthetics and form, which are central to critical appraisal of mainstream dance (2011:10-13). In a political context, what she terms a disability culture:

The emphasis on artists' political action places my critical project in a context that identifies with a directed, political, artistically articulated and shrouded, but yet urgent and necessary agenda. I am fascinated by how artists use specific experimental techniques towards self-empowerment, system critique and identitarian allegiances (in various combinations). Kuppers 2011:10

In essence she can be seen to argue for consideration of what part, if any, does the artist's impairment play within the work.

The Deaf artist, theatre director and Disabled activist Jenny Sealey is concerned with the visibility of disabled people in public spaces including the performing stage. She distinguishes two equally valid projects for Deaf and disabled artists:

Disability Arts is about artists with disability expressing stories about disability. Arts and disability is about enabling access for artists with disability to creative expression that may be unrelated to disability.

Sealey cited in Arts Council Australia 2010:1

Sealey is an artist whose national and international career has been shaped and supported by Disability Arts. Her comments are based on a long and

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<sup>44</sup> Bell's work with Marc Brew in 2012 will be discussed in chapter six.

detailed knowledge of the history and development of both the field and the practice of artists engaged within the field. She was a founder member of the London Disability Arts Forum, and Common Ground Sign Dance Company, and in 1997 became Artistic Director of Graeae, a disability led theatre company. In 2012 Sealey was Co-director for the large scale opening ceremony for the London Paralympic Games.

Sealey stresses the need for an element of choice for the artist to place their work either within a Disability Arts field or in other fields of art. In other words she demands the same access to the arts for disabled people as for other spheres of public life. What then becomes important for her are the choices and resources available to enable the artist to strive for excellence is to be 'the best that we can be' in all artistic fields (Sealey cited in Arts Council Australia 2012:1).

These choices can be extended to consider access to existing training courses as well as to work within the theatre profession. During Sealey's period as Director of Graeae the Company has been involved in exploring a wide range of themes with casts of deaf and disabled actors and has collaborated with a number of UK theatres (Graeae 2013). Graeae has actively engaged with the theatre profession with the preparation of manuals, for casting directors, theatre directors and for educators in the field of performance skills.

In a filmed interview Sealey notes how skills linked directly to a specific impairment can be important resources for an artist, for example, her own finely developed visual acuity that she draws on as director (Collins 2013). She is also clear that the inclusion of deaf or disabled actors in any theatrical profession is not simply a question of equality of access but actually enhances and extends the possibilities for the director.

In a public lecture demonstration (SDT2012), to an audience that included producers and arts commissioners, Sealey illustrated this thesis by recasting a fragment of Frederica's Garcia Lorca's *Blood Wedding* (1933). She used the same fragment of text, but shifted who played each role. Sealey demonstrated

how different interpretations of text, and the nature of communications within the family group portrayed could be enhanced and varied according to which role was played by a deaf actor using sign as well as spoken text.

When Sealey started in her career in the late 1980s she had few examples of deaf or disabled artists upon which she could draw and at school the majority of teachers did not see performing arts as a possible career for her. She recalls, however, the importance of two teachers in her schooling who were able to envisage such a career possibility (Collins 2013). The first, a ballet teacher who told the newly deaf seven-year-old Sealey, that of course she could continue to attend class, not hear the music, but closely observe the movement of others. The second, a teacher in sixth form, supported her applications and her eventual acceptance on a performing arts course at Middlesex Polytechnic.

Sealey can be said to be addressing artistic fields where disability as a trope is present, but the active engagement of individuals with a range of sensory cognitive or physical impairments is not conceived of as a possibility. Both with the teachers who could envisage a performing career as a future possibility for her and Sealey's own actions to foster a similar imaginative process in admission tutors for courses and casting directors, she can be seen to try to shift and to change attitudes to allow individual disabled artists to develop and to exercise their individual capacities for creative imagination.

As an individual artist, the embracing of an identity as a deaf artist for Sealey includes a positive identification of the value of skills that stem directly from living with her impairment and their use in the service of her artistic creativity. In turn Sealey's own practice opens up an imaginable model for future deaf or disabled entrants to the field of professional theatre.

#### **4.6 From Representation to Presence**

This chapter began with consideration of cultural representations of disability and the ways in which these are and have been used as narrative devices within different art forms. When deaf and disabled artists begin to enter artistic

fields there is potential for development of counter-narratives around disability and impairment.

The need to accurately document and to archive both the range of artists entering the field and the nature of the work becomes an important concern that is only beginning to be addressed. It is not simply a matter of scholarship but one of importance in supporting the work of future deaf and disabled artists and their training and is of particular relevance in the field of dance.

The archiving and wide dissemination of the work can offer specific examples to challenge the imagination of casting directors, commissioners, theatre directors and choreographers. An understanding of historical processes and conditions that have fostered the emergence of deaf and disabled artists can help with strategic planning to support the careers of future artists.

The emergent field of Disability Arts, by the end of the twentieth century, began to provide opportunity and support for deaf and disabled artists. It aimed to develop a community of disabled people and placed, and continues to place, a strong emphasis on the need to build a political movement. In this sense a disability political movement looked to various art forms to support and raise the political consciousness of audiences of disabled people and their non-disabled allies moving them towards shared political objectives.

Within these political objectives there are two problems to be identified. Firstly if the work remains largely addressed to this specified audience, and within a disability subculture, how may the work impact on the cultural representations already dominant in other art fields? In this context there is a further question of how to appraise the nature of the work created in order to add to its complexity and impact?

One answer to the first question is that suggested by Williamson that the disability artist needs to attend to other radical forms of performance. By forging links between Disability Arts practice and other forms of arts practice with radical agendas the artists' work may then seek to challenge not just societal arrangements but also the nature of aesthetics and form within pre-existing art forms.

Williamson's approach also opens the possibility of a critical register that attends both to a political message and to the ways in which it is communicated that is informed by a Disability Arts' perspective. Such an approach can allow for considerations of both content and form when assessing the work.

Hoghe offers one example of how an artist may both use his visible impairment as a part of his art but also plays with artistic form and address a range of universal themes. He places his work firmly outside Disability arts. Like his former colleague Pina Bausch he produces work whose form and content is exposed to international critical acclaim but equally has its detractors who favour other dance forms. Hoghe engages directly with those forms and innovations in dance of the late twentieth century that have emerged within an international field of dance.

Sealey embraces two projects of equal importance for deaf and disabled artists: Disability Arts whose subject matter is disability and, art that addresses a range of themes in other art forms. What then becomes common to both is the development of appropriate training and dissemination of work that makes it both imaginable and possible for a deaf or disabled person to develop ambitions and ideas as an artist.

It opens up another question for those dance artists who choose to make work within dance as an art form. Is it possible by 2012 to identify not just individual disabled artists working within the field of professional dance but is it possible to see an emerging sub field, that of a dance and disability sector within the wider field? The next chapter turns specifically to the dance sector in the UK in the twenty first century and the nature of developments that offer points of entry to the sector for deaf and disabled artists.

## 5 Disabled People & the UK Dance Sector in the Early 21st Century.

In order to consider the effectiveness of moves to open up the dance sector for disabled dance artists this chapter begins with an overview of the UK dance sector in the first decade of the twenty first century. It then moves to social and legislative changes that sought to foster to the educational and training opportunities for disabled pupils.

These are explored in direct relation to forms of dance training and access to training. The chapter then moves to consider the role of community dance organisations in this process and later developments in what it describes as a dance and disability sector. It ends by considering how these elements combined in the creation of an international festival of the work of deaf and disabled artists, *Unlimited* that ran along side the Olympic and Paralympic games held in London in the summer of 2012.

### 5.1 Access to dance. Right or Possibility?

The Disability Discrimination Acts (DDAs) passed in 1995 and 2005 and the Equality Act passed in 2010 introduced measures to prevent discrimination against disabled people in employment and the provision of services. The Special Education Needs Act (SENDA) (2001) and later amendments to the act impose duties to encompass not only avoidance of active discrimination against disabled people but also promotion of equality of opportunity between disabled and non-disabled people. The DDA impose a duty on performance venues to make reasonable adjustments to allow disabled people access to performances. The reality is that both the age and architecture of many buildings and slow shift in attitudes that still consider audiences as mainly composed of non-disabled people have meant that not all dance performances are accessible to disabled people.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See for example a discussion of these issues in relation to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Trueman (2013).

Under the DDA disabled people have the right to seek training and employment as professional artists. The ability to exercise that right in meaningful ways requires not only shifts in provision but also major shifts of imagination and attitudinal changes within training institutions, the industry and the art form itself. A number of leading bodies in dance education now provide clear guidance to teachers and courses on the nature of that duty both in admission practices (ISTD 2012) and in training methods (CDET 2012b) as well as consideration of how to present opportunities to prospective students (Conservatoire for Dance and Drama 2007).

There is of course a difference in seeking equal opportunities to compete for dance training and receiving a place on a course as a right. As the deaf artist and disability arts advisor Jo Verrent, notes:

Not all those who would like to 'be a dancer' have the raw talent or ability. This is not meant as a rejection of those who do not conform to the typical image of the dancer – dance is not about what limbs you have or how you learn; this is about performability, stage presence or stage awareness. Just because a person is disabled is not in itself a good enough reason to justify their involvement in dance training or performance. ADAinc 2007:18

Before considering the ways in which the access to training for disabled artists, the nature of that training, and the career pathways opening up to them, it is useful to consider the nature of the UK dance sector and patterns of employment within it.

## **5.2 The UK Dance Sector as a Labour market.**

There are problems in obtaining a detailed and comprehensive picture of the dance industry across the UK that result partly from the disparate nature of the sector and from ways of defining its parameters. Arts Council England commissioned a mapping exercise that aimed to provide an overview of the

dance sector in England<sup>46</sup> for the period 2004-2008. The final mapping drew on information gleaned from consultations with dance educators, established dance companies, dance organisations, and workers in the professional dance sector. The executive summary (Burns and Harrison 2009:15) identified a total workforce of 40,000<sup>47</sup> people engaged in the dance industry, with dance teachers representing the largest group in the workforce.

The report indicated a major increase in numbers of students enrolled as in higher education dance programmes in England over the previous five years. For the academic year 2006/2007 the Burns and Harrison report records a total of 3,645 students on undergraduate and postgraduate courses and a further 6,237 in further education and accredited vocational dance or musical theatre training.

A more detailed analysis of 808 responses to a survey of those earning a living through dance for the period 2008/2009 revealed that 38 per cent of respondents earned between £5,000 and £20,000 in that period and 23 per cent under £5,000. There were large geographical differences with almost half (49%) of the dance workforce located in the South of England. Despite the poorly paid nature of the work, many workers were educated to a high level, with 62 per cent holding degrees. In their conclusion, Burns and Harrison suggest that there is a need to consider both the training of students and the development needs of the workforce as a whole (2009:15).

Burns and Harrison highlight the need for on-going training and support in developing teaching, entrepreneurial, and management skills in parallel with performance and choreographic ones to entrants into a profession where they will require a range of these skills as teachers and independent artists. The extent to which these entrepreneurial skills might be fostered in formal teaching, encouragement of reflective practice, and closer partnerships between HE courses and the dance industry is highlighted in another report by Burns (2007) that drew on examples of practice on HE courses.

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<sup>46</sup> For a similar comprehensive overview and mapping of the dance sector in Scotland see Clark (2012).

<sup>47</sup> This figure includes those both in paid and unpaid employment in internship and other unpaid roles



In effect, what is being presented is the fact that only a tiny minority of those seeking employment in the dance sector will gain employment as dancers with well funded and established dance companies. For the majority it involves developing a range of skills, and combining various part time roles and a likely move to southern England in order to sustain any career in dance.

Before such needs for training in entrepreneurial skills, teaching and administration can be addressed for disabled students and artists, they need first to gain access to training.

### **5.3 Public policy and Educational Attainments of Disabled Pupils**

Two UK disability scholars, Sonali Shah and Mark Priestley, consider the impact of public policies on the general employment and educational chances of young people born with major impairments over a period from the 1950s until 2011 (2011). They combine government statistical information with detailed life stories collected from people born in the 1940s, 1960s and 1980s. While their research shows an improvement in educational attainment for disabled pupils in relation to non-disabled pupils over this period it also exposes continuing and significant differences (2011:93-118).

Shah and Priestley report significant improvements in the move from specialist separate schooling to mainstream schooling for the disabled pupils. They point to the key role of expectations and educational aspirations on the part of schools, family and the young people themselves. Despite increasing concerns with disability reflected in educational policies they note a continuing gap between the achievements of disabled young people and those of their non-disabled peers (2011:144). This narrows considerably at a higher level of training and education (115). While there is still a considerable gap between the two groups at the point of entry to higher education, this is small in terms of the attainment of first or high second-class degrees of students who reach higher education (DCSF 2010, ODI 2010).

What these figures raise is the question of imagination on the part of teachers and also students around expectations and possibilities for further education and for training. These are similar to those that will be discussed in the next section in relation to dance training and factors that impact on young dancers in training.

Shah and Priestley argue that, over time, public policies have sought to improve on the life choices and possibilities available to individual disabled people but that this impact is not always what is intended. For example, policies may have fostered the inclusion of disabled children in mainstream classrooms but the use of one-to-one support from learning support assistants and adult surveillance of the child can contribute to their isolation from other pupils and experiences of building relationships with fellow pupils (Shah and Priestley 2011:161-163)<sup>48</sup>.

Disabled pupils schooled in specialist schools might potentially face lower expectations of what they might achieve but have access to other pupils, each with the experience of managing the impact of impairments and the disabling attitudes of others (21011:163). This question of the knowledge and support of other disabled people is raised within the family context.

Shah and Priestley point out that young disabled people are often the children of non-disabled parents (Shah and Priestley 2011:150). Disabled young people, on the whole, lack exposure to the intergenerational models of older disabled people in their family or local communities who may have successfully negotiated potentially adverse attitudes and barriers to educational, social and working situations.

They also raise the question of access to other disabled people in work as role models and support for young disabled people entering the labour market and select examples of how organisations led by disabled people can function as important points of entry and sources of support early in their careers (Shah and Priestley 2011:170-172). For one respondent, Amy, these

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<sup>48</sup> Possible unintended consequences to be borne in mind when introducing one-to-one support through the use of dance support workers for disabled students in integrated dance classes.

experiences, including encounters with disability arts, offered a supportive starting point from which she would eventually move to take up employment in a more mainstream organisation:

It's a wonderful starting point, it's been a wonderful grounding, but you can't stay there forever, being patted on the back by your colleagues and peers, because what's the point? Amy quoted in Shah and Priestly 2011:171.

For another respondent, Tan, contact with disabled artists and journals associated with the emergent disability arts movement of the 1970s offered an exciting and challenging contrast to an art school where:

I'm in a world of non-disabled people who have no knowledge and understanding of disability art and the politics of disability. They steered me away from doing work that was disability oriented. – Tan cited in Shah and Priestley 2011:170

Tan found opportunities to exhibit her work, to contribute to the newly founded magazine DIAL (Disability Arts in London) and an aesthetic and political frame that she could share with a network of other disabled artists as she developed her career as an artist (Shah and Priestley 170-171).

As a disabled art student admitted to an art college, Tan felt frustrated by a culture that she experienced as antithetical to her use of her experiences of impairment and disability as a source for her creative work but she nevertheless represents a shift in attitudes and opportunity for a disabled student to study at an art college. The access to training available for disabled students as dance artists, whether at tertiary or HE level remained for a considerable time a far greater problem.

Between 2003 and 2008 attempts were made to both identify the number of disabled dance students in training in tertiary or HE courses and to consider questions of recruitment, course curricula development and support for disabled dance students (Whatley 2007, 2008; Verrent 2003,2008). Dance educators, particularly those running degree level courses, have continued to

wrestle with these matters in terms of pedagogical theory and practice in the training institutions (Koch 2013; Whatley 2008).

In the early twenty first century integrated Dance Companies including Blue Eyed Soul, Magpie, StopGap, Candoco began to offer an alternative route to training through internships and apprenticeship schemes. Candoco ran a specialist Dance Foundation course for disabled dancers between 2004 and 2007<sup>49</sup>. Shah and Priestly can also be seen to alert to researcher to other potential sources of support and informal training for young disabled artists.

## **5.4 Participatory Dance: The Community Dance Sector**

In a report by Arts Council England covering research conducted during the period 2004 to 2008, and published before the sharp economic downturn in the UK economy, Suzanne Burns and Sue Harrison (2008:19) provide figures for participation in dance at community level in England. They refer to over 3,000 amateur and voluntary sector dance groups engaging 140,000 people and note that 11% of all classes offered in creative adult learning are in dance. Useful though this overview is, no definitive figures are offered as to the numbers of disabled people engaged in these activities.

To find out more about the nature of community dance, *Animated*, the journal of the Foundation for Community Dance (FCD), offers clear accounts of the evolving nature of community dance practice in the UK. The journal also provides a dedicated section for articles on Dance and Disabled people that supports Cunningham's claim of increased participation by disabled people. The FCD is a UK-wide organisation. In the mission statement posted on its website, it declares a fundamental belief in the transformative potential in dance:

We believe that dance can transform the lives of individuals and communities. Our vision is for a world where dance is part of everyone's life, our mission to make engagement with dance important to individuals, communities and society. FCD 2013

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<sup>49</sup> Funding for the course was finite but by 2014 no comparable course had emerged to take its place.

Adults and young people, non-disabled and disabled, choose to take up opportunities to participate in dance at a non-professional level for a wide variety of reasons. It may represent a social activity; an enjoyable way of enhancing physical or mental wellbeing; an opportunity for creative expression; a way of gaining a greater appreciation and understanding as a viewer of dance; a place to participate in culturally specific forms of dance to enhance a sense of shared community with other participants from that culture; or somewhere for developing and enhancing technical dance skills. To claim that participation in community dance events is necessarily transformative is open to debate<sup>50</sup>.

What is at stake is the opportunity for disabled and non-disabled people to access dance for all or any of the purposes outlined above. The current website of the FCD delineates a number of strands to its work, including that of professional practice. It is interesting that it sees the roots of the work it offers specifically in professional development for disabled artists as stemming from what it identifies as the:

key principle of community dance – every body can dance with intention and purpose and working on the basis of what people can do rather than what they can't. Community dance offers wide ranging opportunities for disabled people to engage with dance: personal and collective expression, advocacy for disabled people in the wider community, artistic skills, active and healthy leisure activities and professional opportunities within dance and the arts. FCD 2013

As a strategic support as well as membership organisation, FCD<sup>51</sup> offers continuing professional development opportunities for non-disabled and disabled artists, teachers and dance organisations involved in 'leading, delivering or supporting participatory or community dance'. One important strand of that work is the development of workshops, training manuals, and an

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<sup>50</sup> See for example Houston (2005) where Sara Houston, dance scholar and Chair of FCD, urges caution in making claims of transformative powers for every project.

<sup>51</sup> The full range of this work can be seen both through its journal and activities and projects posted on the FCD website

annual summer school that explore skills and approaches for those 'leading dance with disabled people'.

FCD's work has gone further than simply addressing teaching approaches for use in community classes, projects and workshops. In 2002, the FCD launched its *Potential* programme. *Potential* was a strategic programme whose overall aim was to 'make a positive contribution to the perceptions and profile of disabled people in dance' (Scott 2005:2).

From this initiative FCD developed a monthly on-line briefing of events and training, a six month co-mentoring Professional Development programme, *Reflectors*, pairing disabled and non-disabled artists with a view to develop aspects of their professional practice, and the establishment of a regular section in *Animated* the FCD journal.

Most people who participate in community dance have no wish to proceed to training as professional dancers<sup>52</sup>. There is clearly a difference in being free to exercise a choice to participate in community dance and consideration of embarking on training for involvement in dance as a professional artist, or in other professional work within the whole dance sector.

For a number of professional disabled dance artists, community dance programmes and participatory workshops provided by a range of dance companies, particularly those with a disability focus, have provided and continue to provide, important sources of training and professional development (Jones 2010, Verrent 2003). More traditional routes to dance training involve training that is costly both financially and in the physical and mental effort required to produce the extraordinarily athletic and skilful performer.

## 5.5 Formal Training in Dance and the Disabled Student

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<sup>52</sup> Arts Council England has conducted annual surveys of who participates in dance starting from 2007 as annual *Taking Part* surveys. These taken together with similar surveys conducted by Arts Council Scotland produce interesting demographic profiles of the population participating but are less helpful in producing a clear and nuanced picture of why people participate; see Bunting et al (2008).

In 2003 Jo Verrent, a deaf artist and disability arts advisor closely associated with the development of disability arts in the UK, likened the position of disabled people seeking training and professional pathways into dance to that of black and Asian artists in the 1970s (2003:25). She suggested that it might take a similar thirty-year period for disabled people to gain full representation within the field.

Verrent listed a range of areas for exploration that could equally be applied to both disabled and black and Asian dancers. Verrent considered cultural constructions of disability, attitudes towards disability within the industry, constructions around the ideal dancing body, practical forms of recruitment and training including the inexperience of teachers, pre-vocational access to training and access to role models of successful disabled dancers.

Verrent's 2003 research in England was funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and addressed vocational training in private dance and drama schools at a post-school level. Verrent's company ADAinc was further commissioned by the department to review the impact and implementation of recommendations made in the 2003 report (ADAinc 2007).

For the 2003 study, Verrent's overall brief was to 'identify options for securing effective and appropriate opportunities for students with disabilities to take part in the existing DaDa Scheme' (Verrent 2003:12), a programme of scholarships to support vocational study in 19 colleges/schools. She was further required to advise DfES on how such options might be implemented.

Verrent was able to draw on data collected as part of a wider study of groups under-represented amongst holders of the DaDa scholarships, conducted by The Centre for Educational Development Research (CEDAR) at Warwick University. Her further research not only covered college students, college staff and courses, but collected the views of a range of stake holders: companies with a disability focus; performers; employers in the performance sector; providers of other forms of training; and key organisations such as the Foundation for Community Dance and employers both in dance and theatre.

Verrent reported that while employer responses indicated a smaller demand for disabled dancers than for disabled actors, both sets of employers found it difficult to recruit artists with the required prior level of technical training (Verrent 2003:11-12). This lack of access to such technical training was a major concern for the performers she surveyed and was confirmed by other organisations such as Candoco.

One important route for many was through disability specific companies. Verrent's figures do not fully separate the views and experiences of theatre and dance performers. She concludes, however, that most dancers 'reinforced the desire to have access to mainstream training as opposed to disability-specific options where possible' (Verrent 2003:6).

In the CEDAR survey of the 2000 cohort of second year dance students registered in the 19 colleges, only 1.5% of the 450 students responding to their questionnaire self-described as disabled (2003:11) and all of these were dyslexic. Other sources of information from colleges concerning other student years referred to a few students with sensory impairments, and only one reference was made to a student with a physical disability. Verrent's more detailed investigations conducted with the 19 colleges suggested that this snapshot view of the composition of the student population reflected the longer-term picture of student participants in courses.

Other surveys of students engaged in dance courses at higher education and conservatoire level (Whatley 2007; Conservatoire for Dance and Drama 2007) have revealed a similar pattern of very small numbers of students with self-disclosed disabilities and a very limited range of disabilities represented within the sample. For example the Conservatoire monitoring of students for the years 2005-2005 and 2005-2006 revealed that over 70% of disclosed disabilities related to specific learning difficulties (SPLDs), particularly dyslexia. Their 2007 report notes that this is consistent with surveys across the HE sector that show a much higher incidence of students with SPLDs in institutions and departments that specialise in art, design, or the performing arts than in other areas of HE study.



In Verrent's 2003 survey, however willing many colleges might have been to look at their practice, ways of recruiting and approaches for working with disabled students, most courses lacked the experience of working directly with students with a wide range of impairments. Where colleges did have such direct experience, for example, with students with SPLDs, Verrent identified a growing expertise in support and teaching methods in relation to these students (2003:46). It was harder, however, for staff to translate their experiences, for example with injured students, to consideration of how to work with disabled students.

One interesting example Verrent noted is that staff from a number of courses were able to describe and acknowledge an experience of establishing an effective and sensitive way of continuing to support a student following a recent injury. The staff she interviewed found it extremely hard, however, to imagine that this might offer a bridging example of how the course might adapt to include a student with a similar and more permanent physical impairment (Verrent 2003:7).

In her final report (2003), Verrent makes it clear that her aim was to find ways to assist courses to make necessary changes to their practices rather than to castigate them for their failures:

Those who view inclusion as an imposition foisted upon them by the funding system are unlikely to embrace inclusion as an opportunity for change. A punitive approach to inclusion is unlikely to inspire them. These schools will need to be won over by other measures. They will need to be inspired by the creative potential of disabled people in the performing arts. - Verrent 2003:7

The detailed 72-page report offers not only an overview of attitudes and practices at college level and examples of good practice but also lays bare the often complex and attitudinal barriers linked to both curriculum and to aesthetic judgments and the nature of the art forms concerned. Exactly that range of imaginings around impairment and disability discussed in previous chapters.

Verrent noted considerable variation between schools in what were barriers to physical access. This ranged from those providing 'good and well considered access for any physically disabled people' to those spaces 'posing significant access issues' (2003:49). Most schools demonstrated evidence of reflection on how to improve this (48-49). One (unnamed) school was clearly resistant suggesting that it was not necessary to make changes as 'it was unlikely that anyone needing that degree of access would be taught at the school' (Verrent 2003:49)

Verrent demonstrates a series of difficulties specifically relating to accessible dance training:

Put at its simplest, access to dance training for most disabled people can be seen to be more problematic than access to drama training.  
Verrent 2003:50

She raises a number of issues including: curriculum and potential for extension and modification; methods of teaching dance technique; the nature of some genres within the art form itself; lack of pre-vocational training for potential disabled students; and a lack of experience and confidence of staff in working with 'difference'.

Verrent also raises the importance of examining a school's genuine willingness to consider disabled people as applicants for the course and, in particular, how this was conveyed in the school's marketing and recruitment material (2003; 35-39). Perhaps the most daunting exposition of a school's requirements can be seen in the prospectus of one of Verrent's group of vocational schools:

Dance is a precise physical art concerned with shape, line, co-ordination, musical and performance qualities. It is within these parameters that the... school welcomes applicants with disabilities.  
Cited in Verrent 2003: 36.

In her conclusion and recommendations for strategies to shift opportunities for access to training for disabled people, Verrent (2003; 59-64) acknowledged

the likely long-term nature of the process and recommended a series of shorter- and longer-term strategies to be implemented particularly in relation to students with cognitive impairments who might first need to look to specialist dance companies such as Magpie or Anjali who had pioneered the development of dancers with a variety of cognitive impairments.

Shorter-term strategies included the creation of some disability-specific forms of training to be developed in parallel with changes in mainstream provision including the fostering of apprenticeship schemes linked to specific companies. One might envisage some problems in such approaches, including the different levels of training that can be offered by individual companies who operate at different levels. It was, indeed, a point raised by a number of the performers included in her study.

In dance, Verrent's specific recommendation for development of a foundation level course for sensorially and physically disabled students was subsequently realised in courses run by Candoco Dance Company between 2004 and 2007 before they were discontinued due to lack of continuing funding. One important development from that course in relation to teaching practice was the development by its director, the dancer Susie Cox, of ways of teaching ballet technique to make it accessible for disabled students.<sup>53</sup> Training institutions began to address the question not only of teaching methods but the ways in which they developed recruitment material to attract disabled students<sup>54</sup>.

It can take time for new initiatives to impact on training. If teachers have never worked with a disabled student, or if student and teacher have no access to the range of dance work created by disabled dance artists it will be hard to reimagine dance or dance practice. In 2011, for example, dance educators

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<sup>53</sup> For a fuller description of the course itself and the adaptations in technique developed by Cox and her colleague Kirstie Richardson see Cox 2007.

<sup>54</sup> A question raised in a strategy document on Disability Equality published by The Conservatoire for Dance and Drama and its eight affiliated Schools (Conservatoire for Dance and Drama) in 2007.

attending the *Cultural Shift* meetings convened by Candoco raised a number of concerns. Some noted the lack of adequate pre-vocational training for disabled applicants. Others expressed doubts about their own ability and confidence to adapt existing ways of teaching. Many noted their own limited or complete lack of contact with dancers with physical impairments, either in their classrooms or in those in which they themselves had trained.

Since Verrent's initial report there has been an increase of courses specifically aimed at training dance teachers at all levels and building their confidence in providing dance classes and workshops that can adequately include students of all abilities<sup>55</sup>. There is a small but growing literature that includes practical manuals of exercises and techniques for students with different physicalities who wished to commit to regular training in dance as well as the more detailed accounts of curriculum development and pedagogical methods appropriate to tertiary level courses (Whatley 2008).

Some of this literature emerged from teaching experiences linked to companies employing disabled artists such as UK Company Candoco (Benjamin 2002). More recently, US Company Dancing Wheels produced a manual that attends particularly to techniques for dancers using wheelchairs and designed as the first of a specialist series of techniques for dancers with different impairments; both sensory and physical (Verdi-Fletcher and Tomasic 2012). Some manuals of codified forms of techniques emerged from the practice of individual dance artists like Bill Shannon a hip-hop and performance artist who has produced a detailed manual and DVD of his crutch-based techniques.

Beyond questions of basic training remain those of building and maintaining careers in the dance sector. This raises questions of continuing professional development and support for disabled dance artists particularly for those who seek to be dance makers or choreographers.

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<sup>55</sup> For example the summer programmes run by the Foundation for Community Dance and the Step into Dance Programme of the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD2012) and teacher training courses run by Candoco.

## **5.6 Professional Development and The Dance and Disability Sector UK 2010-2012**

Adam Benjamin co-founded Candoco with Céleste Dandeker in 1991. In a 2010 article he both reviews the past and offers an optimistic picture of the position of disabled dance artists, (artists with physical sensory and intellectual impairments in 2010). He cites Celeste Dandeker, David Toole, Chris Pavia, Laura Jones, Bill Shannon, Marc Brew, Chisato Minamimura, Clare Cunningham and Caroline Bowditch as a 'generation of disabled dancers who have made an impact on dance in the UK' (Benjamin 2010:112).

Benjamin speaks of a group of trained and experienced disabled performers who, he claims, are, 'for the most part, capable of learning and interpreting the traditional lexicon, albeit in wheel chairs or on crutches' (Benjamin 2010:118). For Benjamin the successful careers of these dancers answers the questions originally posed in the 1990s as to whether disabled dance artists could find gainful employment in dance.

He continues by suggesting that 'recent decades of integrated dance make British dance audiences as discerning of the choreographic frame, and the individual performances of inclusive dance, as we would be of the performance of any other professional work' (2010, 117). He argues that such an audience is equipped to move beyond commenting on the novelty of the mere presence of a disabled performer to consideration of how the performer's abilities are used and developed within the work (2010:117).

Benjamin's long experience in the field of inclusive dance makes these claims worthy of consideration. There is not, as yet, any audience research to substantiate his claim of greater sophistication in the audiences for the work of disabled artists. Again it raises the need to afford students and more general audiences opportunity to view performances by disabled artists and to develop a critical framework for analysis of the work.

Benjamin also makes a bold claim that 'today inclusive dance companies... and disabled artists permeate the British Dance scene' (Benjamin 2010: 111). He further added that as disabled artists have come to work in mainstream

dance their presence has forced 'dance practitioners to reconsider our physical workplaces and our aesthetic and ethical values' (Benjamin 2010:111).

He is claiming major shifts in how the dance sector, and those who engage in that highly competitive field, allow for disabled dancers and their performance to find places of value and influence within the field. Benjamin seems to suggest that a relatively small group of companies and performers, relative to a much larger range of non-disabled artists and companies that do not employ disabled artists, have a disproportionate influence on the sector as a whole. It is not entirely clear how such a strong claim is to be substantiated.

His more modest claim is that each inclusive company or disabled artist entering the field can challenge imaginings about the accessibility of the built environment and raises questions about the nature of dance performance. Benjamin is in a position to identify changes over time but the sector can look rather different from the perspective of more recent entrants to the field.

The disabled dance artist Clare Cunningham for example takes up the issue of dance training in the UK in an interview she gave to a Romanian television channel (Vişan 2011). In the interview Cunningham, like Benjamin, draws attention to a significant core group of UK deaf and disabled artists, professional artists currently making work and performing at a 'high level' of skill and highlights the issue of access to training for disabled students.

From the perspective of her own experience, Cunningham talked of a lack of development of accessible professional training for disabled dance artists other than in 'small but significant pockets' in a few tertiary institutions. She posits a vicious circle where potential students do not apply for courses, courses are not then required to review how accessible their courses may be and disabled students do not apply because courses do not appear to meet their requirements for training.

Two years previously, Caroline Bowditch, another recent entrant to the UK dance sector takes up some of these issues around what might be deemed questions of imagination and of expectation. In an interview soon after taking

up her post as Dance Agent for Change with Scottish Dance Theatre, Caroline Bowditch commented:

I think part of this new job is about looking at who says who can be a dancer and who says what a dancer is. I find dance so elite and exclusive and excluding, that I think if I'm on the inside of it then there's much more chance of me being able to hold open something that says 'Come on!'. Bowditch cited in Sync 2008

Bowditch spoke about a need to convince disabled people that the dance sector in all its forms, amateur and professional, was one where disabled people might participate. At the same time she addresses a need to shift attitudes within the dance sector so that the participation of disabled people is to be expected and welcomed.

The question of actual or potential shifts in the dance sector with respect to disabled artists and students became a central focus in a series of events held between 2010 and 2012 which aimed both to consult and to develop strategies across the dance sector to bring about major shifts to the benefit of deaf and disabled dance artists.

*Cultural Shifts* was a series of open debates co-convened by Candoco Dance Company, The Foundation for Community Dance (FCD) and Scottish Dance Theatre (SDT) and its Dance Agent for Change, Caroline Bowditch. These debates and Bowditch's more deliberately provocative *Devil's Advocate* sessions represented an attempt to reach a wide range of potentially interested parties and to move outside of the London region<sup>56</sup>.

In many ways the debates re-visited older debates about how to teach, how to open training opportunities to disabled students and where and how to show the work of disabled artists as well as how to analyse and discuss the work. What was noticeable, however, was the range and experience level of the educators, artists, and arts administrators attending.

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<sup>56</sup> The debates took place in a variety of locations South Bank Centre London, Laban Centre London and at Blue Coats Arts Centre in Liverpool during the international Festival of the Deaf and Disability Arts, DaDa Fest in 2010.

They were able to draw on a shared knowledge base of the work of a wide range of companies both professional and semi-professional that featured the work of disabled dance artists as well as experience in devising and delivering training. Their presence supports Benjamin's claims of the important role played by established disabled artist in bringing this work to the attention of the profession.

The question not only of pathways into the profession for trainees but the showcasing and commissioning of work by more mature disabled dance professionals came to the fore in *Pathways to the Profession* Symposium organised by Scottish Dance Theatre in Dundee towards the end of Caroline Bowditch's work as Dance Agent for Change with the Company. The Symposium brought together stakeholders from across the whole of the UK. It was attended by disabled performers, members of companies, disabled artists, educators and trainers, and academics, together with key representatives from the mainstream performance arts field.

The Symposium functioned both as showcase for existing work and as a direct challenge to participants to consider the role of their own organisations. They were directly challenged to consider where their own organisations or practices either did, or could, contribute to both the showcasing of work by disabled artists, and the bringing together potential commissioners, managers of venues and disabled dance artists.

## **5.7 National Platforms and a Spotlight on Disability in Summer 2012.**

The Pathways to the Profession Symposium was followed in the summer of 2012 by an event that provided a platform for the work of a range of deaf and disabled artists who were brought to the attention of national and international audiences.

London was host to both the Olympic and Paralympic Games in summer 2012. A Cultural Olympiad in the form of a four-year programme of sponsored cultural projects and participatory arts events had brought attention to the arts



in general and ended with a series of festivals located in London. The *Unlimited Festival* at the Southbank Centre filled its performance and exhibition spaces with many of the 29 new commissions from deaf and disabled artists involving nearly 200 deaf and disabled performers. The work was presented in the largest and arguably most prestigious performance venue in the UK. The artists were able to extend their range of work and to draw on resources and artistic collaborations made available through new partnerships with major performance companies.

Perhaps even more significantly, the work of disabled artists as directors and producers of large-scale spectacles was featured in the opening and closing ceremonies of the Paralympic games and of the opening of the Olympic sailing events at Weymouth. For a short time it was as if a series of barriers to participation for disabled people were simply removed, both in their use of public spaces and in their presence on the performing stage. This illusion was compounded by the presence of hundreds of volunteer workers who helped to temporarily remove any possible barriers for disabled people travelling throughout London transport to arts and sporting events.

The events of summer 2012 offered a temporary vision of what it might be to live in a public space that accorded to an affirmative model of disability, a space where impairment, whether physical, sensory, emotional and cognitive difference is simply ordinary. As might be expected, the staging of sporting and cultural events during a period of austerity and uncertainty inevitably fuelled discourses of hope, inspiration, and transformation. The lasting impact of these events requires careful reflection and observation of the subsequent careers of both artists and athletes, decisions made about benefits aimed to support disabled people and continuing the admirable attempts to improve access to public spaces for the summer of 2012.

As discussed in chapter three the advertisements in the media for the London Paralympics presented competing athletes not just as dedicated practitioners but also as inspirational, and as the 'superheroes'.<sup>57</sup> These images did not go

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<sup>57</sup> To view the advertisement created by Saatchi and Saatchi and sponsored by BT see Paralympic Superheroes available from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEwOn0GisY8>

unchallenged in the work presented at *Unlimited* In one *Unlimited* commission, a film *M21* was made by a group of disabled artists who offered an ironic counterview with a 'festival' of live events filmed in and around Much Wenlock, a small town in Shropshire, and shown throughout the *Unlimited* Festival. It features the wheeled Olympic mascots invading a local fete, the supportive cries for the 'athlete' attempting the disability hurdles to cries of 'you can overcome this' and the 'disabled artist-as-object': a human baton transferred from one relay runner to another in a race through the village.

There is no doubt, however, that new audiences were introduced to the work of a range of deaf and disabled artists through this funding and showcasing of their work by *Unlimited* including the dance artists Caroline Bowditch, Clare Cunningham and Marc Brew. The *Unlimited* Festival also re-opened debates around the nature of the work presented by participating artists. Some artists chose to present work that was overtly political in content and intention with regards to public imaginings around disability and the place of disabled people in society, whereas others made very different decisions as artists and creators in the theme and styles of the work they presented

A series of editorials and articles on *Unlimited* were published on the online journal *Disability Arts Online* between August and October 2012 that commented favourably on the quality and artistic merit of the work presented. They raised questions, however, about its relationship to progressing the careers of disabled artists in distinctly different artistic fields, which they designated as mainstream arts and disability arts. Colin Hambrook, artist, editor of the journal and a key figure in the development of disability arts in Britain, wondered if 'we are at a crossroads where Disability Arts has had possibly the biggest profile ever - in terms of *Unlimited* - but is equally in danger of sinking' (Hambrook 2012).

It is also interesting to note that *Unlimited* coincided with the annual Liberty Festival of Disability Arts in London that has, in the past taken place in Trafalgar Square, a location associated in the national culture with

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demonstration, protest and political activism. In 2012 this festival, (that included work by a range of disabled dancers and companies such as Bill Shannon and StopGap), was moved to the Southbank in London. The move may have resulted in increased audience size and exposure for the artists. The move can, however, be seen to have a symbolic significance representing, as it did, a move from a space long associated with public protests to one primarily associated with artistic performance. In other words it potentially raises questions of what was gained and what lost in the process.

While events at *Unlimited* showed work of considerable originality, depth and variation by disabled artists there were also strong concerns expressed at the possible loss of the radical ideas, and the Disability Arts, that nurtured the work of UK disabled artists.

## **5.8 Subversion or Identification?**

A series of discussions convened during the festival under the title *Unlimited Voices* provided space for discussion among disabled artists. Questions were raised about whether or not they should or would wish to identify publicly as disabled artists or for companies to market their work as Disability Arts or simply dance, or theatre. Hambrook in the same editorial picks up this theme noting that:

Clearly the divergent views on the limitations of identification, versus supporting the cultural values of interrogation and subversiveness implicit within Disability Arts are arguments, which will carry on. - Hambrook 2012

It might be anticipated that these will not only be arguments between those who place higher value on the content and politically informed nature of disability art work and those more concerned with artistic values related to form, in dance and theatre. Competition for increasingly scarce public funding resources to fund artists and their projects is likely to sharpen the debate and create further tensions.

Again, the question of the increased visibility of deaf and disabled artists in the Paralympic opening and closing ceremonies met with mixed reception in some areas of Disability Arts. The powerful presence of 78 professional performers in the ceremony is contrasted with the nature of the wider group of participating volunteers. In an article published by the Welsh Disability Forum (Pring 2012), the artist and director of the Disability Arts Festival *Together*, Ju Gosling, raises concerns about recruitment and rehearsal practices that led to the inclusion of only 50 disabled volunteers amongst the 3,000+ volunteers performing in those ceremonies. Nonetheless, what both the ceremonies and *Unlimited* offered was a selection of current work by disabled artists from across Britain and examples of the breadth of content and subject matter in the work.

This chapter has considered the practical and attitudinal barriers that have prevented full participation by disabled dancers but research has revealed that at least part of the UK dance sector was willing to re-consider these barriers in the early twenty first century.

All of the attempted developments in the UK dance sector between 2010 and 2012 need to be considered within the implications of a changing economic climate. In March 2012, for example, Blue Eyed Soul Dance Company, an integrated dance company based in Shrewsbury with a national and international reputation closed down when it lost its Arts Council funding in around of funding cuts.

Both access to training and to professional pathways for disabled artists have resource implications. Crow's 2012 artistic protest, discussed in Chapter one addresses the proposed cuts to benefits that directly meet the extra costs of working. Such costs are linked directly to needs associated with specific impairments. The travel expenses, sign interpreters, personal assistants covered by Access to work programmes are directly at risk.

*Unlimited* offered deaf and disabled artists opportunities to present their work in a prestigious venue and to demand serious critical engagement with their works and artistry. At the same time the unstable nature of cultural imaginings

of disability was apparent in the contradictory images of hero and benefit scrounger appearing in press and television over the summer of 2012. Alliances and collaborations between organisations could be seen in the development of the *Unlimited* project that offered a potential base for further developments and collaborations within the dance profession and across arts funding organisations.

By 2010 it was possible to identify a group of experienced disabled dance artists working both independently and under contract to established inclusive or integrated companies like Stop Gap and Candoco. Between 2010 to 2012 consultative projects like Candoco's *Cultural Shifts*, Bowditch and SDT's *Devil's Advocate* debates and SDT's *Pathways to the Profession* symposium had the overt intention of gathering information from a wide range of interested parties. They were able to gather together arts advisors, choreographers, dance educators, artistic directors, individuals, disabled and non-disabled actively engaged with professional dance and disabled dance artists.

The events were focused around question of relevance to strategic planning aimed towards further developments of the careers of disabled dance artists. I would argue that what we were witnessing was debates and planning within a dance and disability sector that had emerged as a clearly identifiable subfield within dance. It is a field that clearly interconnects with the subfield of community dance. There are ways in which it can be seen to overlap with a Disability Arts field but in others it can be as distinctive in its concerns and emerging internal debates around practice and aesthetics.

The interrogation of the systems and structures that have had a direct influence and impact on disabled dance artists in this country provides a broad context for a close reading of the work of the three artists who are the principal focus for discussion; Bowditch, Brew, and Cunningham. The inclusion of their work in *Unlimited 2012* afforded opportunity for greater recognition adding to the ability of each of them to lay claim to an identity as disabled artist, performer and choreographer.

The next three chapters look more closely at their development as artists. The studies consider the nature of personal trajectories of each artist, the distinctive nature of their creative works, and the intersection between these elements and the social and cultural conditions in which they have emerged as artists.

They all three entered the UK dance world at different stages of their professional development, benefitted in different ways from a changing and supportive field of dance and disability and the work of disabled artists who preceded them. They are artists with different artistic pre-occupations. Each has separately had to engage with the impact of their impairments on their own bodily experiences as well with how these are viewed by others.

What the previous chapters have drawn attention to is the need to consider factors at both structural and individual levels that have contributed to their successful penetration of the professional dance field. Shah and Priestley's study demonstrates how shifts in structures have afforded a wider range of possibilities for disabled people but well intended changes in structure may have unintended consequences and can thus both foster and inhibit progress.

The mechanisms of prejudice and fear of disability has deep emotional and psychic roots that impact both upon the perceptions of disabled and non-disabled people and such attitudes are therefore difficult to confront and to change. Over the period covered by the case studies we can see the development of very real changes in structures aiming to offer equal access for disabled artists to training and professional development within the dance field. Such structures and approaches still have to be put in practice and firmly embedded within dance training at all levels.

The artists share with all would be entrants to the dance world the reality that this is a highly competitive world for which many train. Few are able to create, and to sustain, career pathways where they can earn an adequate living through dance. Economic factors impact on dance and its position in a wider field of creative arts affecting what level of training is available and the resources required for theatres, performance and rehearsal facilities. These

factors impact on the ways in which dance artists are employed or funded in their creative work.

Values and aspirations are both a structural and individual concern but at each level form part of the encounters and struggles of people within a particular field. The capacity to imagine what is possible and can be strived for has been shown in the discussions in the previous chapters to be an important part in changing the position of disabled people. They have also demonstrated it is important to consider the alliances an individual disabled artist can make both with disabled and non-disabled people which support successful careers for disabled artists. In other words the studies of each artists needs to consider which individual encounters have contributed to their success in finding respected positions within the dance field.

It is important to consider not only which encounters have supported the work of the artists to be discussed, but also how each artist has made use of these opportunities afforded by these encounters. What the previous chapters have drawn attention to is the need to consider enabling and disabling factors at both structural and individual levels. Shifts in structures have afforded a wider range of possibilities for disabled people but as the discussion of Shah and Priestley's findings demonstrates well-intended changes in structure can both foster and inhibit progress. The mechanisms of prejudice and fear of disability have deep emotional and psychic roots that impact upon the perceptions of both disabled and non-disabled people and such attitudes are therefore difficult to confront and to change.

Over the period of time to be covered by the extended case studies we can observe very real changes in structure aiming to offer equal access for disabled artists to training and professional development within the dance field. Such structures and approaches still have to be put in practice and firmly embedded within dance training at all levels. The extent to which they are already in place, or need to be, is an important element to consider when looking at the career pathways of the three artists who are the subjects of the next three chapters.

The artists share with all would be entrants to the dance world the reality that this is a highly competitive world for which many train but few are able to create and to sustain career pathways where they can earn an adequate living through dance. Economic factors impact on dance and its position in a wider field of creative arts affecting what level of training is available and the resources required for theatres, performance and rehearsal facilities. These factors impact on the ways in which dance artists are employed or funded in their creative work.

Values and aspirations are both a structural and individual concern but at each level form part of the encounters and struggles of people within a particular field. The capacity to imagine what is possible and can be strived for has been shown in the discussions in the previous chapters to be an important part of the disability movement. They have also demonstrated it is important to consider the alliances an individual disabled artist can make both with disabled and non-disabled people which support successful careers for disabled artists.

It is important to consider not only which encounters have supported the work of the artists to be discussed and enabled their progress to a position of respect within the dance field. It is also necessary to consider how they may have contributed to the perceptions and ideas of others and to the structures of the profession.



## 6 The Dance Artist and the Dance: Caroline Bowditch

This chapter discusses the work of Caroline Bowditch, an Australian dance artist who was, by 2012 living and working in the UK. Her contributions to strategic developments in the dance and disability sector in the UK have been noted in previous chapters. She had been successful both in carving a career as a choreographer, and in challenging barriers to participation in her chosen career.

This chapter discusses her journey into dance and development as a dance artist. For this reason, the examination begins with a focus on her experiences in childhood and early adulthood in Australia that may have shaped her journey before she encountered the possibility of engaging with dance as a professional artist. As with any artist, such experiences potentially offer sources on which they can draw in their creative work.

The discussion begins by considering the history of Bowditch's artistic development, firstly in Australia and subsequently in the UK. Examination of Bowditch's career suggests that for a disabled artist the importance of building social capital includes not only the possibility of developing key alliances within the dance sector but also alliances within the fields of disability arts and disability politics within the UK.

Cultural capital, as well as her skills and knowledge develop not just from opportunities to study but also from working directly with knowledgeable and established artists. These opportunities and key relationships are explored both in the emergent nature of Bowditch's practice and body of work as performer and dance maker, and in the context of wider cultural and social shifts.

Bowditch's development as both artist, and indeed her position as strategist in the field of dance, requires consideration of wider shifts that impact upon the dance sector in the UK. In other words her personal career trajectory needs to be considered alongside historical shifts within the fields of dance and the public sphere that have been discussed in the previous chapters.

Bowditch grew up in Australia in both rural and urban settings. She lived originally in Dookie, a small town in the Australian bush, then at the age of 5 when family circumstances changed, she moved to live in the city of Melbourne (Davies 2009). In an interview in 2009 she comments on the response of others in Dookie to the appearance of her atypical body. 'It was a very small town and because of my condition I did stand out' (Bowditch cited in (Davies 2009:1).

Her early experiences confirm Shah and Priestley's findings in their 2011 study that access to educational opportunities as a disabled person may depend not only on attending to barriers to access and formal arrangements to foster this. There are other important factors including early parental attitudes and support.

Bowditch was born with the genetic condition *Osteogenesis Imperfecta*, often known as brittle bones, that made her bones fragile and subject to fracture, particularly in childhood. In an interview with Hannah Davies (2009:1), Bowditch describes parental support in her first school where 'people were petrified' to let her in to school in case her bones fractured.

It can be said that the family functioned as a field in which Bowditch developed a *habitus*; a way of operating that embodied both realistic attitudes to risk and safety regarding the fragility of her bones and dispositions and expectations of achievement and educational possibilities. She moved between mainstream and specialist school classrooms. Moreover, Bowditch recounts how:

My father made me a little box which fit around me so no one could bump in to me...it'd be moved around the classroom. People were frightened to touch me" so initially her mother would come at lunchtime to assist her personal care. - Bowditch cited in Davies 2009:1-2.

In Melbourne, her early primary schooling coincided with the period when her bones would be most fragile and she experienced many fractures that sculpted her body. During this period she was enrolled in what she describes

as a 'special school' where she had access to physiotherapy. She describes the safety and sense of security involved in this environment. 'There was a safety being around other kids with disabilities' (Bowditch cited in Davies 2009:2).

It can also be said that while non-disabled children were excluded from the classroom, she experienced an integrated environment for learning that encompassed the varying capacities and learning styles of children with a range of impairments. Her educational experiences arguably contributed to the ease with which she operates both within mainstream and disability arts settings in her current practice.

Bowditch describes the experience of moving from specialist to mainstream schooling as initially frightening:

My school before had felt very secure but all of a sudden I was surrounded by kids running about, bashing into things. It was a bit of an intimidating experience for me. - Bowditch cited in Davies 2009:2.

Her further description points to the importance of both parental influence and expectation in supporting risk taking. In a planned period of transition between specialist and mainstream school Bowditch attended a residential outdoor camp organised by the new school. Bowditch noted 'I think it was a huge thing for my mum to let go, but I loved it. For the first time I did not feel different to everybody else' (Bowditch cited in Davies 2009:2). One result of her successful participation in the camp was to end the gradual process of transition. As Bowditch explained in her conversation with me in 2013 'the teacher said to my mum we don't need to think about integrating her, it has happened'.

In an interview posted on Arts Council England's InSync website (2013), Bowditch's comment on her family support seems to concur with Shah and Priestley's findings that expectations of success from both school and family have a profound influence upon pupil attainment.

I think a lot of it came from my mum allowing me to take risks. My family encouraged me; I had two big brothers that didn't handle me with kid gloves. Physically they did, but they kind of encouraged me to try stuff, and it was okay if it didn't work out but I could always have a go and see what happens. I didn't grow up being a girlygirl – they wouldn't have let that! Instead it was all about trying stuff and thinking, what's the worst that can happen? - Bowditch cited in Sync 2013

Expectations in this sense include the encouragement to take on potentially difficult projects, to take risks and to discover what may be possible. In the same interview Bowditch identified a number of teachers and figures outside her family who were important in her own development. She noted the role played by her experience of attending a residential workshop in her final year at High School:

It was about getting more disabled students into university and was held at the campus at Deakin. When I first heard about it I really wasn't sure that I would be able to do it, whether I was up to it. You weren't allowed to be taken there, you had to make your own way to the weekend, you had to use public transport and I'd never really done that on my own before. It sounds tiny, I just had to get on the train and there were people obviously at the other end to meet us and it was only an hour from Melbourne, which wasn't far, but it was a huge thing. For me, even the university campus was incredible. - Sync 2013

That such a workshop exists points to development of structures to support young disabled students into higher education. It also points to the crucial place for sharing experiences with other disabled students.

The facilitator, Jenny Shaw, continued to be an important figure for Bowditch, but Bowditch also highlights in this interview is what can be learned from other disabled students and their experiences:

We spent the weekend listening to other disabled students that had gone to university and hearing about what they had done and what

there doing now. It just made me think maybe I can, maybe I can do this. - Sync 2013

The sources show her making a move from a particular protective framework that enables her to begin to rethink the nature of risk in relation to her body, what is possible and what foolhardy. It is noticeable, however, that in these any later accounts by Bowditch there is no mention of the impact of impairment effects, the considerable pain likely to be involved in the sustaining multi fractures and the subsequent healing processes.

Bowditch returned home and told her family that she intended to go to University. In 1990, she graduated from Deakin University with a BA in Education and Performing Arts. Following further training at the University of Melbourne, Bowditch worked as a genetics counsellor and arts training coordinator in Australia before moving to the UK.

Her jobs can be seen to have offered her an opportunity to develop skills in communication, management and organisation of value for her future career. It also raises questions about the possible impact on the thought and attitudes of others. Bowditch would be present as a genetics counsellor whose own impairment is part of her genetic inheritance. The work involves aiding others to examine their own attitudes towards disability and potential impairment when deciding whether or not to proceed with a pregnancy where there is a possibility that the child would inherit a genetically transmitted impairment.

## **6.1 Encounters With Dance**

Arriving in the UK, Bowditch was supported and encouraged to continue with her studies but this did not include encouragement to explore training and development in dance education. In a keynote presentation in a symposium at Coventry University in 2007 she commented that as a student 'dance was never a subject that fired me up'.

Bowditch noted that her interest in performance started for her as musician and singer. During a conversation in 2011, Bowditch recalled vivid memories of university dance classes where they 'did not really know what to do with

me'. Her dance lecturer 'just put me on the side' and said "you just make it up yourself" (Sync 2013). It was not that Bowditch did not enjoy dancing in other contexts but at this stage it is clear that those responsible for her course had not yet found a way to offer an accessible dance class and the dance module became one she hated.

In 1996, Candoco Dance Company announced a series of master classes and workshops to accompany their forthcoming tour of Australia. *Arts Access*, a Melbourne-based professional arts organisation offered a 12-week project, *Movable Dance*, which aimed to equip disabled artists with basic skills in CI to aid their participation in the *Candoco* classes. For Bowditch it offered not only an experience of a different kind of dance workshop but also an opportunity to explore her physicality, and the nature of risk, in a new way.

So we had this 12-week intensive one night a week course. Loads of dance in 12 weeks and once I started, I just learnt so much more about my physicality and my body and what I could do with it that I never ever explored before because the nature of my disability. My life had been about being careful, just in case I broke something. Whereas dance is not about being careful at all, so it was really nice contrast for me to be physically pushing myself and finding out what I actually could do, what my body does do, what it could do that it hasn't been doing. - Sync 2013

Bowditch and eight other disabled artists with performance experience attended both project and classes. Following this, they continued to meet on a regular weekly basis, funding rehearsal space themselves, and eventually created in 1997 a company, *Weave Movement Theatre*. The current company website describes it as 'an exceptionally talented and diverse Melbourne based dance/movement performance company comprising people with and without disabilities'. The description of *Weave's* work as performance that 'combines dance, physical theatre, spoken word and humour' (Weave 2013) might equally describe the nature of Bowditch's own later choreographic creations.

Bowditch described *Weave*'s early formation (2007:25). They met weekly as a group to explore and to workshop ideas in self-funded rehearsal space, and began to perform work at 'disability related conferences'. The need for sustained input over time to establish such a company is noted by disability consultant, Jo Verrent (2007:11). The artists 'dreamed one day being paid for what we were doing' (Bowditch 2007:25). Six years later, as Bowditch left Australia, *Weave* found funding that allowed this to become a reality and the company is now firmly established in Melbourne.

Bowditch credits her experience with *Movable Dance* and *Candoco* as opening up for her a passion for dance. She had danced for pleasure before but what these experiences offered was a 'space of possibility' in Bourdieu's sense where she could reimagine dance as something she might choose to do professionally. It seemed that for Bowditch, dance could for the first time be viewed as a field where a disabled artist might accrue physical and artistic capital. Her comments demonstrate that she was able to revisit her own embodied habitus and to consider what might be possible for her body and its potential range of movement.

Contact improvisation (CI) is a dance form that has its origins in the work of American dancers Steve Paxton and Bruce Curtis and ideas stemming from the 1970s explorations among a group of American dance artists from the Judson Church Group in America. Adam Benjamin<sup>58</sup>, who was one of the workshop leaders during the *Candoco* tour, writes of the importance of CI as a form of dance that 'can leave a doorway to the unexpected and the unforeseen' (Benjamin 2002: 32).

CI has become an identifiable field of improvisatory dance practice of particular relevance to disabled and non-disabled dance practitioners and to those participating in dance at community and professional levels of

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<sup>58</sup> For an overview of how CI as a form has developed since its early development see Novack 2010:170-179.

engagement<sup>59</sup>. The emphasis is on both internal sensation and sensitive interactions between bodies privileging the flow of the movement over specific shapes or movement pattern to be achieved by the dancers. Cooper-Albright in a detailed exploration of the form and its value for disabled and non-disabled dancers (1997:84-92) draws attention to the ways CI 'explores physical exchange between people with very different abilities' (1997:82). In CI, the emphasis is on the 'release of the body's weight into the floor or into a partner's body' (1997:82). Cooper-Albright notes that it:

privileges a willingness to take physical and emotional risks, producing a certain psychic disorientation in which the seemingly stable categories of able and disabled become dislodged. - Cooper-Albright 1997: 85.

Certainly for Bowditch her first encounter with CI opened her own awareness of her body, questions of about risk and her capacity to move and to dance.

In an interview with Ems Coombes, founder and project manager of an integrated theatre company in Plymouth, Bowditch looks back to her introduction to CI as a springboard to her creative world (Coombes 2011). She also describes what might be seen as a moment of disruption of a *habitus* and lived assumptions about the possibilities for movement in her body. Bowditch talks of 'really feeling I had landed in my skin for the first time in my life' (Coombes 2011:1) and becoming 'aware of what was physically possible for me rather than living in a state of fear based on what I was told I couldn't do' (Bowditch cited in Coombes 2011:2).

Elsewhere, Bowditch describes what can be considered as a newfound experience of agency and control saying 'For years people had moved my body around, but when I started dancing it was moving in a whole new way' (Bowditch cited in Davies 2009:1), Her reflections on how she holds this experience in mind when encouraging or mentoring other disabled artists

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<sup>59</sup> For an exploration of its use see Cooper-Albright (1997) and Benjamin (2002).



raise the question not only of movement but how a body occupies space and phenomenological awareness of that space in relation to the body:

So many people have no body awareness at all or any spatial awareness. I don't have that many disabled friends but the ones that I do, often look at them and think 'how much time do you actually spend out of your chair?' Not in bed, not in the shower. I forget how static people actually become, so I'm quite interested in pushing that. And I think I've always quite liked the idea of being places I shouldn't have been. - Sync 2013

Benjamin (2002:32-35), like Cooper-Albright, attests to value of CI for disabled dancers and describes the sensitivity and body awareness of self and other incorporated in physical contact between bodies in CI.

A great contrast can be seen between the image of Bowditch's boxed body in the early classroom situation and the liberating experience of participation in a CI workshop. In a later work, *NQR* (2010), which Bowditch co-choreographed with Marc Brew and Janet Smith, these images can be seen to take an artistic form. *NQR* opens with Bowditch totally enclosed within a white box from which she gradually emerges, body part by body part, to take her place in a company of disabled and non-disabled dancers. In this sense she also emerges to occupy space on a dance stage where in the past as a disabled artist she 'shouldn't have been' (Sync 2013).

## **6.2 Developing as a Dancer.**

Bowditch had encountered for her a new possibility in dance but then had to explore how to enter this world as a young adult. Dance training for non-disabled people often starts in classes attended from the age of 4 or 5 years old. As Verrent also notes 'within the disability and dance sector, it is recognised that many disabled dancers come to dance as adults' (2007:36). This may link to a lack of accessible training and 'assumptions, even in the mind of disabled people themselves, that disabled people don't dance' (ADAinc 2007:36).

With that early dance training can be seen the development of *habitus* of importance to the future career of a dancer. The sociologists Steven Wainwright, Claire Williams, and Bryan Turner (2006) in their studies of The Royal Ballet Company draw attention to the fact that this training involves not only learning particular movements and styles but represents engagement in 'a series of cultural practices' (536). This engagement involves the embodiment of values, ways of approaching learning and performance that construct a training *habitus* that shapes the possibilities for the individual student.

Bowditch's first encounter with the recently established Candoco d Company, challenged previous assumptions about how and if she might dance. Her performance explorations with Weave, and with the other disabled artists who participated may be considered the start of her dance training. Looking back on this experience with disabled artist Em Coombes, Bowditch was prompted to address issues of power, exclusion and inclusion:

I suppose in a way, it probably was the first time that I had worked in that kind of level-playing field sort of a way. Yes I suppose it was the first time I had worked inclusively. Bowditch cited in Coombes 2011: 2

It is not entirely unusual, however, to enter the dance as an adult with prior training in other art forms.<sup>60</sup> The disabled artist and the non-disabled artist may have accumulated important life skills of relevance to their professional choice. Living independently as someone with a major impairment requires skills in planning and management of time and resources in order to work and to move in a world where easy access cannot be assumed. It requires development of skills in planning, negotiation and communication.

Bowditch herself makes reference to this in relation to the skills disabled people may bring to leadership roles in their chosen professions:

We often have untraditional skills, sometimes we have skills we don't even recognise, ones that we use everyday. Like skills around

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<sup>60</sup> Two notable examples are the well-respected British choreographers Richard Alston and Shiobhan Davies.

organising people, or services, or all sorts of things. Its lateral thinking, all those sorts of things we become good at but there's no piece of paper that says what we've got. - Sync 2013

These are consciously acquired skills but also represent positive aspects of a disability habitus created within the unpredictable and potential barriers of daily life for a disabled person. This ability to plan, anticipate possible difficulties, and to find ways off effective communication of others can be seen as exercised both consciously and 'thoughtlessly' that is below the limen of consciousness.

By the time she left Australia, Bowditch's work and artistic explorations had allowed her to consider building performance work with other artists where each artist explored the movement potential of her/his unique physicality. Bowditch had gained direct understanding of arts funding, had moved into the world of adult employment, and had built communication skills in her work as counsellor. She had also left a legacy of a performance project that was to emerge as the professional performance company Weave. Bowditch had taken the first steps in the links she had made with Candoco towards building social capital through what was to become a valuable network of contacts and working collaborations, particularly with Adam Benjamin.

In Australia, Bowditch's first encounter with CI might be said to have involved a moment of rupture between *habitus* and *field* that exposed other possible experiences and possibilities of re-imaging her body as that of a dance performer. Looking back at this experience in a newspaper interview Bowditch commented:

It was amazing. The body that I had been given and that had been so wrong for so many years had finally found its place. - Bowditch cited in Devine 2010

Bowditch's introduction to dance may be seen to have sewn the seed of interests that would come to fruition in her later choreographic explorations and practices. She outlined these in her in a presentation to a UK conference in 2007:

I am a performing artist and choreographer interested in working in non-traditional dance locations with bodies that don't generally fit the dance mould. If I make work with non-disabled dancers I attempt to provide stimulus that makes their bodies move differently from how they move usually, and puts them in locations to which I physically can't get. I am interested in bringing disabled bodies together and seeing what happens. I want to explore things that have not been done before. - Bowditch 2007:25

Her curiosity about her own body and how it might dance extended to curiosity about unique movement possibilities in each body. In the career she was to build in Britain, two strands can be identified. The first relates to her development as a choreographer/ performer. The second relates to her strategic role with a growing influence on the development of a dance world that might welcome disabled people as participants, audiences, and as professional artists. In both roles she can be seen not only to respond to opportunities open to her but also to be proactive and creative in developing them.

### **6.3 Landing in the UK 2002**

Bowditch came to the UK in 2002. The experience of leaving one country and settling in another was to be a source of inspiration for her major outdoor work *Leaving Limbo Landing* performed in 2013 in London, Glasgow and Edinburgh. She moved to Newcastle, a city in the north east of England. Arts Council England was funding a number of ventures that were disability led i.e. where disabled people were central to their management and development. These included Disability Arts Forums and a Disability Arts magazine (DAM). There was a National Disability Arts Forum and Disability Arts forums at regional level including one based in Newcastle<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> For a detailed survey of organisations and artists involved in Disability Arts UK, see Shape Arts (2013) for an open chronology and time line, available on their website.

Bowditch arrived 'knowing only the man I was moving to marry and a few of his friends' (Bowditch 2008: 25). The man she was to marry was the artist, writer and disability scholar Tom Shakespeare whose work has been examined in earlier chapters. The long-serving editor of the magazine *Disability Now*, Mary Wilkinson (2009) describes him as a disabled leader who has made major contributions to scholarship through empirical research and to development of theory within disability studies as well as engaging with disability activism at national and international levels. As an artist and disability activist he performed for five years in street theatre and disability arts cabaret (Wilkinson 2009: 86-88).

Shakespeare moved to the north east of England in 1991. In Newcastle, together with Geoff Anderson, a man with experience of disability arts in London, Shakespeare founded and developed the first British disability arts agency. Over two years he pursued Arts Council funding for the Northern Disability Arts Forum (now Arcadea) and has remained active in the development of arts projects and organisations at national and international levels.

For Bowditch, Shakespeare was a useful source of information about the arts in the UK. Shakespeare was, in turn, to be introduced by Bowditch to a new field of interest for him, that of modern dance, and to tango, which he took up with enthusiasm. 'I loved it. I think one reason was because in most of my life I use my voice and my brain, not my body' (Shakespeare cited in Wilkinson 2009: 96). At one stage he joined the cast of a dance theatre work *Type* (2007), devised and performed by FATHoM Project, an artistic collective founded and developed by Bowditch.

Bowditch was now approaching dance not just as enjoyable recreation but also as someone intending to engage with it at professional level. At an individual level, an independent dancer has to identify possible sources for career development as well as to consider how to engage with these to further her artistic interests. For disabled people a number of shifts both within dance and more generally offered potential sources for development. The problem remained how to engage with these.

## 6.4 Disability and the Dance Sector in the U.K.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) and the Equality Act 2010, offered a basis from which to argue for equal opportunities for disabled people in dance in training, employment and access to audience spaces. Alongside these new powers a number of companies had been established. Candoco, a dance company that brought together on the professional stage disabled and non-disabled dancers, was no longer the only company featuring the work of disabled artists at the time Bowditch arrived in the UK. A number of performance companies had been formed by 2002<sup>62</sup>. These often combined participation and performance at community and professional level by disabled performers, both in partnership with non-disabled partners and as disability specific companies. There was, therefore, an established body of both companies and artists offering clear examples of how a disabled artist might engage with the professional world of dance.

Adam Benjamin, co founder of Candoco Dance Company, notes how in the twenty first century the development of these companies came to offer an effective challenge to 'questions posed in the early 1990s' as to 'whether disabled people could earn a living through dance' (2010: 111). In an article published in 2010 he identified Bowditch (and her unfolding dance career in the UK) as representative of a generation of disabled artists entering a new phase of development where:

Disabled artists, previously confined to these professional inclusive companies, have begun to migrate to projects and performances with other professional companies and dancers. - Benjamin 2010: 112

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<sup>62</sup> In London, this included Green Candle Dance Company, Heart n Soul, and Graeae Theatre Company. In the English regions, companies included Anjali Dance Company (Banbury), Blue Eyed Soul Dance Company (Shrewsbury), StopGAP Dance Company (Farnham), Touchdown Dance (Manchester); Mind the Gap Theatre Company (Bradford), Common Ground Sign Dance Theatre (Liverpool), and Lawnmowers (Gateshead). More detailed inventories of artists, and companies can be found in Benjamin (2002, 2010), Masefield (2006), and Sutherland (2008).

He also identified a significant gap between recognition of the work of these artists and the considerable time it takes to shift to a more critical and scholarly awareness to their work. Benjamin cites the example of Judith Mackrell, the influential dance critic for the *Guardian* newspaper. In 1997 Mackrell wrote in the *Guardian* about the artistic development of Candoco dance company noting that its work 'reinvented the boundaries of dance by proving that virtuosity wasn't confined to the able bodied' (Mackrell quoted in Benjamin 2010: 113).

The year 2004 saw the publication of the *Oxford Dictionary of Dance*, a reference work co-edited by Mackrell. The preface to the dictionary describes dance as 'an art-form that has never been more diverse' and where 'the boundaries of dance are constantly being withdrawn' (Mackrell and Craine 2004:v, cited in Benjamin 2010: 113). No reference is made throughout the dictionary either to integrated or inclusive dance companies or to disability in relation to dance in this diversity of form and content (Benjamin 2010: 113). Benjamin reflects that whatever reasons might be advanced for this omission 'academic and literary acceptance of dance and disability was slow to emerge and had yet to be given their proper weighting' (Benjamin 2010:113).<sup>63</sup>

Bowditch could be seen to be encountering significant gaps between statements of intent in relation to equal opportunities for disabled dance artists and actual practice. She was, also in many ways, in the position of any independent artist hoping to develop a career in a new country. She needed to establish networks, make links and to make space to build upon these to sustain her artistic interests as well as to develop a parallel career as strategist. She needed to make creative alliances with other artists whose artistic practices might help her to form and to develop her own.

## **6.5 A UK Career as Dance Artist**

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<sup>63</sup> It is noticeable that in a later Dance Studies Reader (Carter and O'Shea 2010) that included Benjamin's article, the majority of references to disabled artists are to their role as performer rather than choreographer. The one exception is Vida Midgelow's detailed analysis of a reworking of *Swan Lake* by Raimund Hoghe.

Bowditch identifies what she refers to as several key 'dominoes', links to people involved with different kinds of dance organisations, with different remits, and located in different areas of the UK (2008: 25-28). In each case these can be seen as significant encounters that opened up choices and possibilities in developing her career and artistic vision. The first links were formed in Newcastle and started with meeting with Janet Archer, Artistic Director of Dance City. The second involved links to London and an encounter with Kiki Gale, Artistic Director of East London Dance (ELD). The third started with a meeting with Janet Smith, Artistic Director of Scottish Dance Theatre based in Dundee.

To reach the first domino, Janet Archer, Bowditch had first to overcome a response to her telephone inquiries to Dance City that not only was their building not accessible for a wheelchair user but also, as Bowditch recalls, that they simply 'did not know what was available for someone like me' (2008: 25). Bowditch's response was both to reflect on how important dance had become to her but also to utilise the determination and persistence required by any independent dancer in building a career. By the time Archer had directed Bowditch to *Dance Connect*, an organisation providing support and advice to professional dancers, Bowditch was able to identify clearly her goals. 'I want to dance and if I have to establish an inclusive dance company in the North East to do it I will!' (Bowditch cited in 2008: 26).

In 2004, Bowditch received mentorship from *Dance Connect* to pay for a week where three Candoco dancers came to work with her. The three days ended with an open workshop that attracted other North East dancers interested in inclusive practice (2008:26). For this grouping of artists, 'inclusive' embraced a common interest in work that crosses different performance disciplines as well as a mixing of disabled and non-disabled artists. As with Weave, Bowditch became a founder member of a collective of artists, here the FATHoM Project. The name was created from the initials of the six founding artists, including, with typical Bowditch humour, her contribution as 'the little o'

*FATHoM* not only engaged Bowditch's skills as fundraiser to help establish it as company. It also created opportunities for the cross arts explorations that



would come to represent a significant strand in her future work. The company's work embraced both public performance and work that would be used as the basis for community dance projects.

*Slight* (2008), a work directed by Adam Benjamin in collaboration with the company, brought Bowditch back in contact with a key mentor and collaborator, one of her dominoes, and offered experience of the use of structured improvisation in the creation of choreography. The work was performed in a number of North East venues and, in 2010, as part of a festival of community dance, *Connect*, based at Sadler's Wells in London.

Bowditch formed another partnership at this time with the North East based artist Fiona Wright. They met at an open workshop facilitated by Candoco. Fiona Wright is a choreographer with national and international experience whose work spans both forms of dance and Live Art. Bowditch joined two other dancers in Wright's 'Girl Jonah' Company for a reworking of a piece *Three: Dances* (2004). The intention behind the work is described thus:

We have a question about moving together, about being in synch, or in unison: some questions about staying together. We make a copy then we look to see the differences.

How do we stay together - and why would we?

- Girl Jonah

In a filmed version of the work (*Girl Jonah* 2012), Bowditch is shown as the voice of the prologue, then a still and attendant witness to the movement of the other three dancers. By 2006 *Girl Jonah* had become a collaborative partnership between Wright and Bowditch described on their website as:

a duet collaboration between two choreographers (one disabled, one non-disabled) currently working together on dance performances that touch the borders of mainstream assumptions about implicit and explicit images of 'the contemporary dancer' and the different potentials for our bodies to be seen as knowing, skilful and passionate.

- *Girl Jonah*

Bowditch is credited as co-creator, as choreographer rather than simply performer. *This Too* (2006) and *She Was only a Knife Throwers' Assistant...* (2008) play with the same movement phrases in two contrasting female bodies exposed to view by costumes similar in style.

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Figure 1 Wright and Bowditch

Figure 1 shows both women in a moment *from She was Only a Knife Thrower's Assistant...* Wright and Bowditch sit in similar poses and stare out defiantly at the audience. Publicity for the work on the Jonah website includes the following text:

Playing the same character. Some kind of double. We are both she.  
 Solo dances at the same time. Different songs at the same time.  
 Looking for a voice. Looking for a song.  
 Putting your words in my mouth. Keeping your nerve.  
 When the knives are out, at least you know where the danger is coming from.  
 Stand there, no, not there, there.  
 Whatever you do, don't move.  
<http://www.girljonah.org/swakta.html>

They lounge, chat, and, move together. The identical burlesque costumes convey a sense of women put on display and a shared role where sticking to the rules, staying on full view but unflinchingly still, is a matter of life or death. The two performers expose bodies noticeably female, one with curves incised into the younger and smaller body of Bowditch, the other leaner longer body Wright showing marks of ageing. Wright and Bowditch in this work are women who know how they are positioned in this iconic female role and within a patriarchal society. They know their place and at the same time resist it. The audience is invited to stare at the different aspects of their differing bodies yet they stare back both inviting and challenging a male gaze that fails to see beyond bodily presentation.

In this work and *This Too* the audience is presented with the realities of the fleshy body not the archetypical young dancing body with its illusion of perfection and the otherworldly sylph. There is a sensuality and sensuousness to the movement of the two adult women. The movement is often minimalist in form as the two women explore their bodies and the space between them. Wright is tall, thin and wiry, Bowditch short and curvaceous. In these duets both performers speak brief, sometimes oblique, narratives of different thoughts and experiences. At times there are shared silences and moments of stillness revealing two women apparently at ease in the company of the other.

*This Too* both in the film version and the live performance invites close scrutiny of the differences in the bodies of the two performers.

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Figure 2 This Too two different feet

Figure 2 shows a moment when the foot of one performer is replaced by that of the other, each dabbling in a mirrored pool indicated by the shining tray on the floor. One foot, that of Bowditch, seems squashed uncomfortably into a child's shoe, the other that of Wright, is raised, encased in the binding form of a high-heeled shoe. Both are bound by the constricting fashioning of women's clothing.

In *This Two* there is a momentary reference to 'mermaids' who become 'more talkative when they move nearer the surface of the water'. This phrase both recalls and contrasts with Hans Anderson's fable *The little Mermaid*.<sup>64</sup> In Anderson's story the mermaid suffers a loss of voice and excruciating pain in order to adapt her movement to living outside her world and to walk on land rather than swim in the sea. She willingly undertakes these experiences in the name of love for a human male. In *This Two*, different bodies and different worlds rather offer possibilities of contemplation and new and creative experience. The movement in both works that Bowditch creates with Wright is precise, often minimalistic and reveals the different pathways and possibility in each body.

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<sup>64</sup> Den lille havfrue; the original title in Danish can be more accurately translated as the little Sea Lady rather than The Little Mermaid in the title by which it is commonly known in English.

The artistic structure of the Girl Jonah works sits at the border between dance and other performance forms. The venues where the works have been performed suggest a useful exposure of Bowditch's work to different audiences in different types of venues in London, Liverpool and Dublin. Bowditch had begun to perform and to devise work with other artists in the UK. Her link with ELD, the second domino in her list, and involvement in a choreographic mentoring programme marked a further development in her move to establishing herself as a professional choreographer.

## **6.6 East London Dance and Cultural Shift 2005**

In 2005 there were very few professional disabled choreographers *Cultural Shift 2005* was a choreographic mentoring programme jointly funded by the East London Dance agency and the European Regional Development Fund. As such it can be seen as a well-funded initiative linking directly to national and international developments in relation to social and educational policy and disabled people. A press release issued by ELD describes the project and its aims as follows:

Cultural Shift is a pilot professional development programme, supporting the development of disabled choreographers. It is the first programme of its kind in the UK and aims to address the lack of disabled choreographers in the integrated and mainstream dance sectors. - East London Dance 2005.

It was generously funded, a model programme that took advantage of the national and international concerns with the rights and position of disabled people and funding available at that time. In many ways it may more properly be termed intensive training rather than simply a mentoring programme. *Cultural Shift* offered the disabled artists opportunities to build skills and ideas that might have been otherwise fostered in an accessible and basic vocational course but one with access to technicians, producers, and professionals established within dance.

The programme provided twelve days of choreographic workshops and seminar discussions. An invitation was extended to each artist to create a dance work for performance at the *Xposure Festival* 2005 at Stratford East. It drew on the contributions from within the dance sector at this time including dance critics, artistic directors, professional disabled dancers and contemporary choreographers. Each of the five artists<sup>65</sup> had an allotted time of nine weeks of studio space, a small production budget as well as eight hours of mentorship from an individual choreographer.

The programme allowed for individual tailoring according to both the development goals of artists and the diverse range of work that was to be produced. It also allowed the luxury of a well-supported opportunity to make work that included input by experienced theatre technicians. As Bowditch puts it 'I was given total artistic licence to go with my creative idea, and, all of the staff at ELD made it happen and gave me their full support' (2006:31). While the individual elements of the programme spoke to the needs on developing artists there was little guarantee of obtaining funds and resources to ensure a series of similar programmes in the future.

For Bowditch, who successfully bid for a place, this was a timely opportunity to build skills as a choreographer, to extend her network of professional contacts and to subject her work to critical appraisal. In an article documenting the project, Bowditch records her desire to gain an objective understanding of 'whether or not I had potential to produce work that was of a quality and standard worthy of being shown in a professional context' (2006:30). Bowditch noted a problem shared with other disabled artists regarding the difficulty of finding on going constructive and robust feedback on their work and her feeling that 'there is often a protective layer that surrounds work produced in a disability dance context' (2006:30)<sup>66</sup>. For her a crucial element of the course was the engagement

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<sup>65</sup> The five artists who participated in Cultural Shift had different ways of movement and making and were at different stages in their choreographic careers. Three, Caroline Bowditch, Tom Clarke and Tom St Louis, were users of wheelchairs and two D/eaf dancers, Jo Dunbar and Mark Smith, were not.

<sup>66</sup> For discussion of these concerns about critical engagement with the work of disabled artists see 4.4.

The programme fostered development of the artists' own critical awareness of their work and that of others and offered a useful model for future training and development for other artists:

We were encouraged to develop a critical eye that we could then turn to our own work. We were being taught how to take control of what people saw, felt and thought about our work. - Bowditch 2006: 30.

*Tear* (2005), Bowditch's work for Xposure, reconfigured the café area at Stratford Circus as a performance space. Bowditch choreographed movement for a non-disabled dancer, Rachel Kay, to be viewed by an audience placed in balcony spaces on the stairwells surrounding the space. She recorded her own voice to record text as a soundscape. The text as words was then projected across the naked bodies of Bowditch and another dancer as a moving text and captured as a film installed on all the screens throughout the venue.

All of this tested Bowditch's technical skills and enhanced her understanding of the work of a professional choreographer. The process of making *Tear* brought Bowditch face to face with what she describes as 'the harsh reality of having to choose dancers, manage rehearsal schedules' (Bowditch 2006:31). As she puts it 'I quickly learned that choreography was really about making decisions, many of them difficult' (Bowditch 2006:31).

It might be said that *Cultural Shift* succeeded in launching Bowditch as a choreographer who had moved to build work at a professional level. One outcome from exposure of her work was a commission to create a site-specific work for the London Festival of Disability Arts, *Liberty*, six months later<sup>67</sup>. This marked a professional move that required her to meet the challenge of managing a project with a substantial budget and artistic team of five artists within demanding time constraints to create work that was seen by up to a thousand people (Bowditch 2006:26).

The dance sector had begun to create opportunities for disabled artists and

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<sup>67</sup> At this time Liberty Festival was a major showcase for the work of disabled artists and work selected for performance was presented within a Disability Arts context.

Bowditch was ready to engage with these. In 2007 Bowditch was faced with a number of opportunities to develop her career. As a performer she was already working with Adam Benjamin in the making of *Slight* for the FATHoM Project and was successful in gaining a place on a development project for professional dancers, the Dancers' Project at The Place in London. As a dance maker Bowditch secured funding from the Wellcome Trust to create *Proband*, a solo work that will be discussed later in this chapter. As an artist she was presented with opportunities that would enable her to engage both with the field of disability arts and that of mainstream dance. The proffered opportunities required her do some stocktaking, to reflect upon the skills she wished to acquire and to make decisions about how to move forward in her career as performer and dance maker.

## **6.7 Janet Smith and Scottish Dance Theatre (SDT)**

The third domino to which Bowditch refers is a relationship with started in 2002. Bowditch was one of four disabled artists invited by the Artistic Director Janet Smith to join company members for a week of research and development conducted by Adam Benjamin towards building a new dance work *Angels of Incidence*.

For Bowditch this research and development process 'pushed the limits of my physicality and my artistic values. I was out of my comfort zone' (Bowditch 2008:27). A number of specific opportunities arose as a result of her participation. Smith invited Bowditch to join the cast and to tour with SDT if funding for the dance work was secured. Smith also encouraged Bowditch to apply for a place on the *Dancer's Project*.

At a personal level Bowditch was faced with questions about the kind of artist she wanted to be and the kind of work she wanted to make. SDT is a repertory company based in Dundee. It is perhaps the foremost mainstream dance company in Scotland with an established touring circuit for their work in small and larger venues in both Scotland the UK.

Bowditch describes this initial experience of working with SDT as 'playing with



the big boys' and she had to 'really search deep as to whether this was what I wanted' (2008:27). She talks of the level of skill and craftsmanship in performance and choreographic process to which she was being exposed as involving 'quality' and to the realisation that:

I only want to produce quality work BUT that implies that I have to bring a certain quality myself and this value is often what I feel is missing from inclusive work. – Bowditch cited in 2008:27.

In the use of the term quality Bowditch seems to touch on a number of themes that echo for example with the concerns of Aaron Williamson about the depth and skill in the work of disabled artists. It implies work that has been refined, subjected to critical review during the process of making and attention given to detail in an intense and focussed period of making.

This involved an uncomfortable and honest self-appraisal. In an interview, Bowditch recalls taking a 'good hard look at myself' and asking the question 'are you prepared to take the next step and actually really consider yourself to be a professional dancer' (Bowditch cited in Coombes 2011:4). This kind of honest self-reflection and clear thinking both about what will be demanded of her and the cost of meeting those demands represents an approach that runs through accounts of Bowditch's development.

At times she has used her own position to pose uncomfortable questions of others with a full understanding of what personal costs; emotional, psychological and, physical, may be demanded of the aspirant disabled artist. At a *Devil's Advocate* debate Bowditch chaired at Sadler's Wells in 2011, she mused out loud as to whether the failure to take up opportunities offered to disabled artists was as much as result of laziness, or unwillingness to take on such onerous commitment and risks as it was the result of fear.

Bowditch decided to accept the invitation to join the cast for SDT's new work. Part of her preparation for this was her successful application to join the weeklong *Dancer's Project* at The Place. Like so many of the experiences already described she was to be placed in the position of pioneer or innovator. She was not only one of the first disabled artists employed by a mainstream

Scottish dance company but was also the only disabled dancer in the group of twenty at The Place.

She notes with some cynicism that her inclusion on The Place week might have represented a tokenistic engagement with diversity (Bowditch 2008:27). Was she helping an organisation to meet a nominal quota to fulfil a technical requirement for inclusivity or had she been assessed on her merits as an artist? She is, however, clear about the usefulness of the experience from her point of view:

I think about this experience a bit like selling my soul to the devil. Maybe I only got picked because I was disabled but this week allowed me to find what was unique about my movement quality, explore my own aesthetic, find out what appeals to me when viewing or creating dance. I may have given 19 dancers an experience they had not had before, I may have sold my soul to the devil but it was a very conscious sale and it was done on my terms. - Bowditch 2008:27.

At SDT, *Angels of Incidence* (2007) had a very different starting point, both as a work and vehicle for inclusion for four disabled artists. Janet Smith, the artistic director of SDT was clear about her aim to contribute to shifts in a dance sector that for her discriminated against disabled artists. In a conversation with Jo Verrent (2010) Smith traces her thought processes:

I thought, well, what can we do at SDT to nudge the status quo. Let's get some dancers into the company who can hold their own and there will be no dip in the work. That way we can inspire a new generation of dancers who go "Right, yes, I want to do that" - Smith cited in Verrent 2010a: 16.

Smith echoed Bowditch's interest in quality of performance. In an interview Smith noted that 'in 2005 there were no Scottish disabled dancers who could do what Candoco did' and so she had 'brought in an American, two Australians and a Yorkshire man' (Smith cited in Devine 2010).

Recalling her first observations of Bowditch as a performer during the first research week, Smith noted a particular quality in Bowditch's presence:

Caroline just cruised from one end of the studio to another. She sashayed up to three other able dancers and upstaged them, so I knew her to be at least their equal... It was like she was throwing another card on the table. - Smith cited in Devine 2010.

Three of the four guest artists in *Angels*, Brew, Bowditch, Michael King, and Cornelia Kip-Lee were noticeably older than other members of the cast. Smith commented on her choices with a particular focus on Bowditch:

Dance Companies tend to work with very young people because most give up in their thirties, which means there can be a lack of range of experience. Caroline was older and with a totally different life experience, and had the perspective of an outsider. - Smith cited in Devine 2010.

With *Angels* Bowditch was to be exposed both to an experience of an intensely concentrated period of making and rehearsal of a work but also to the experience of touring and performing. It can also be seen as an opportunity for Bowditch to experience ways of engaging with a collaborative model of dance making under pressure. On the SDT website, Bowditch is credited as both performer and contributor to the work. This credit implies that Benjamin employed a collaborative choreographic process with his artists, which is one to which Bowditch could make a welcomed contribution.

In an interview exploring the process of making of the work (Bordwell 2007), Janet Smith described a key element in Benjamin's use of improvisation in rehearsal to support the artistic explorations of the cast. She noted how Benjamin worked with both the flow and interruption of the flow of bodies moving together in space. She observed how the moving presence of the guest artists had a disruptive impact on the habitual movements of the SDT dancers (Smith cited in Bordwell 2007:1).

Smith described how the movement explorations and emergent themes incorporated in the final work began to coalesce in Benjamin's rehearsals:

Partway through the process, he introduced the idea of stop – of not going with, of going against. And when he did this, it was like these disruptive angels come in and they make an interesting offering choreographically and as well, he talked about, just the notion of angels, the idea that we each could be at the right place in a moment of our lives to do something amazing for somebody and people told their stories around this, particularly of course the people with disabilities, who had very strong stories to tell. - Smith cited in Bordwell 2007:1

*Angels* explores the impact of chance and influential encounters with others, encounters both uncomfortable and enabling. It is not a work that engages directly with disability. Benjamin's approach to his disabled and non disabled dancers echoes Cameron's affirmative model where impairments are valuable attributes that form a core part of being and experience, and valued sources for artistic creation. As such he can be seen to offer Bowditch first hand experience not only of developing as performing and skills relevant to touring with a professional company but ways of approaching the movement possibilities available to the choreographer.

Benjamin at his disposal both wheel-based dancers, those who dance more of the time using wheelchairs, from foot-based dancers, those who dance using their feet to travel in the space. In *Angels* Benjamin inverts the cultural stereotype of the helpless, supported disabled person. Many of the duets and quartets involve the guest artists giving both bodily and emotional support and advice to the non-disabled dancers on their journeys through the performance space. Duets between disabled and non-disabled male members of the cast show a mutual interdependence as each urges and supports the other on his journey.

At times, the stable points of a wheel-based dancer's relationship to chair and gravity allow for dynamic and intricate patterns of rising and falling and vertical

movement by the whole the cast. These passages can be seen as employing similar devices to those employed in the body of work of established integrated companies such as Candoco or Axis.



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Figure 3 Image from Candoco website

The Candoco publicity photograph in figure 3 captures an example of balance and counterbalance where it is unclear who balances on whom or what. In *Angels* there are times in such complex groupings when it is not easy to disentangle whose arm or leg is moving in the ensemble or where the weight is distributed amongst the bodies of the assembled cast.

In Bowditch's duet with a male SDT dancer Benjamin uses the silent gliding afforded by Bowditch's electric wheelchair to enhance a quiet and gentle beginning to a lyrical duet. The movements are often simple, involving an isolation of body parts such as a hand or Bowditch's foot. Benjamin works with the scale of Bowditch's body in ways that emphasise a delicacy of touch between the larger hand of the male dancer and her foot to enhance the delight and of first contact between a man and a woman in a romantic encounter.

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Figure 4 Duet *Angels of Incidence*

Figure 4 shows a movement towards this engagement of hand and foot while Bowditch's hand remains firmly on the joystick that controls the movement of her chair. Here, as in much of the work discussed in this chapter, the eye is drawn to Bowditch's hand and foot, and their expressive potential. There is a certain quality to their fleshy presence, whether contrasted with those of a

male partner here or in her *Long and the Short of it* duet, or with another woman in the Girl Jonah performances. Her hands and feet are not delicate fluttering appendages of a young girl but rather those of a woman. They are small and have a strong and three-dimensional shape to express her intention and will in any encounter. In *Angels* the presence of her dark square solid wheelchair, very different from the light weight dancing chair used by Lee elsewhere in the work, acts like a solid base, almost a throne, suggesting a grounded sense of self from which she engages with the man she encounters.

At a symposium on Live Art and Disability, *Access All Areas* (2011), Bowditch and Pell considered a range of newspaper reviews of work by disabled dance artists that remain pre-occupied with impairment and novelty. The reviews analysed by Bowditch and Pell reveal a strong emphasis on the impairment of the dancer. They observe how often the concern is with images of the inspirational heroic or incredible figure of the disabled dancer who overcomes barriers as opposed to engagement with content and form of the work.

*Angels*, like the later work *NQR* (2010) that Bowditch co-choreographed for SDT with Janet Smith and Marc Brew, involved a disabled and non-disabled cast of dancers touring a work in a programme where they were paired with other new works performed by core company dancers from SDT<sup>68</sup>. In both cases the works were subjected to serious critical reviews that moved beyond commentary on the novelty of inclusion of disabled dancers to an engagement with analysis of the form.

Reviews could be seen to have given serious consideration to the success or otherwise of the works themselves as realizations of artistic visions. For example, a review of *Angels* in *The Stage* by art critic Lindsay Winslow (10.03.2010) is positive about the use of complex movement vocabularies in the work but raises questions about the clarity and consistency of its narrative.

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<sup>68</sup> *Angels* formed a double bill with Smith's new work, *Touching Zulu* (2007) a piece that engaged with encounters between human beings and the natural world. *NQR* was performed alongside Ben Duke's *The Life and Times of a Girl* (2010)

In a review of *NQR* the Times art critic Donald Hutera (15.03.2010) again comments favourably on much of the work but raises different questions around the realisation of an artistic vision when three choreographic voices are involved.

At the *Devil's Advocate* open debate chaired by Bowditch at Sadler's Wells in 2012, the art critic Donald Hutera raised wider issues to do with editorial control. Hutera noted the powerful gatekeeping function of editors in selecting which new or innovative works are to be considered the subject of reviews. By including *Angels* and *NQR* as part of the repertoire of an established company, Smith brought them directly to the attention of both critics and their editors, making it more likely that these works would be reviewed. This strategy can also be seen as part of Smith's wider vision as Artistic Director and apparent in the way she built a company repertoire by mixing works by established choreographers with work by emergent practitioners.

Thus far this chapter has considered some of the opportunities and influences that shaped the development of Bowditch's progress and vision as a professional artist, both as performer and as choreographer. She was able to work directly with professional choreographers, to develop her chosen craft and to find ways of identifying, developing and expressing her own artistic voice.

The development of a mature artistic style or the career trajectory of one artist is not one of simple cause and effect or a linear pathway that brings to fruition a single creative seed. In many ways Bowditch's development might be seen as one of extending the generative capacities of a *habitus*. As Bourdieu writes:

Because the *habitus* is an infinite capacity for generating products-thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions- whose limits are set by historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditional and unconditional freedom it provides is as remote from creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from simple mechanical reproduction of the original conditioning. - Bourdieu 1999: 55



Bowditch's personal trajectory was shaped not only by encounters with significant individuals such as Benjamin or Smith but also by shifts within the dance field and its structures that opened possibilities for disabled artists. The funding that became available and the nature of the projects with which Bowditch was engaged had their roots in slow but shifting changes in thinking and practices within the dance sector. These in turn interconnected with the wider cultural and political shifts in the UK discussed in the previous chapter.

## **6.8 Bowditch as Choreographer**

The role created for Bowditch at SDT was that of Dance Agent for Change. She took up the role in 2008 with an initial two-year contract that was extended for a further two years.<sup>69</sup> Bowditch's contract with SDT included a strong strategic element in her role as Dance Agent for Change as well as opportunities to develop her skills as performer and choreographer. It was also a contract for 9 months each year leaving her time to make work both within the company and outside. At SDT Bowditch was able to build skills as performer, working in a touring company and exchanges ideas with other artists.

Bowditch contributed to the learning of other artists in turn. In her role as Dance Agent for Change for SDT she facilitated dance experience at a pre-vocational level for young disabled people. Both as a Dance Agent for Change and in her membership of the board of the Foundation for Community Dance we can see the contributions that a disabled artist may make to strategic planning for the recruitment and training of disabled artists in the future. This aspect of her work brought her to wide attention as workshop leader, contributor to discussion forums and strategic planning in both Scotland and the rest of the UK.

Tracing Bowditch's time at SDT it is possible to support Benjamin's contention about the disproportionate effect a few disabled artists can have on improving access to all areas of the theatre, backstage, on stage and rehearsal rooms. It

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<sup>69</sup> The Scottish Dance Theatre website provides valuable documentation of the project including assessments of its impact by Bowditch herself and an Impact report by Jo Verrent.

is a contribution Janet Smith noted in her pre-performance talk prior to the evening concert of performances during *Pathways to the Profession*. She spoke of the contributions Bowditch had made within the company and the community in furthering opportunities for disabled people to participate in dance as well as her contributions as member of the company as performer and choreographer. Smith notes how doors, walkways and working spaces have been changed. She also drew attention to the alterations made in the theatre that evening made to accommodate a large number of people in wheel chairs, using hearing loops, visual describers and requiring other particular adaptations. She commented that it had made the management both re-think what true access might mean as well as making them realise that the theatre space was much more flexible and open to adaptation than had been previously considered. As Smith said 'it has opened our eyes and will now form part of our thinking' for future performances'.

As a company member of SDT, both in performing and teaching collaborations, Bowditch provided an opportunity for professional development for non-disabled members of SDT. Bowditch co-created several works while at SDT, three of which used dancers employed by SDT: *The Long and the Short of It* (2009) with Tom Pritchard, *NQR* (2010), and *Leftovers* (2010); a series of short duets with Marc Brew which was premiered at DaDa Fest International Festival 2010. Brew, who held an Associate Director Fellowship with SDT during this period performed with Bowditch in *NQR* and was one of the three choreographers working in partnership with Bowditch and Janet Smith.

As sole choreographer Bowditch created *Proband* (2008), a work commissioned by The Wellcome Trust. Bowditch created a live solo work and dance film where she was both performer and choreographer and it is the only work to date which engages directly with the nature of her impairment. At the end of her connection with SDT she secured and realised a commission to choreograph *Leaving Limbo Landing* (2012) a work created for *Unlimited* in 2012.

*The Long and the Short of It* (2009) is a short exploration of a flirtatious relationship. This three-minute duet was originally devised by Bowditch and SDT dancer Tom Pritchard as a playful introduction to dance for pupils attending a school dance workshop facilitated by SDT and was subsequently included successfully in the company's touring repertoire.<sup>70</sup> It uses a modern version of the old gospel blues song *Nobody's Fault but Mine* by Rising Appalachia that has a swinging, inviting rhythm. The bodies of the two dancers, long Tom Pritchard<sup>71</sup> and short Caroline Bowditch, pick up the rhythm with fluid flirtatious and sinuous movements. The dancers convey a sense of pleasure both in the company of each other and in moving to the infectious rhythm of the music. They dance in unison at times picking up a movement from the other.

Difference in bodily stature becomes a theme to be explored within the curiosity and the delight of discovery of an intimate relationship and there is a joyous quality to the work. As in many of her works there is a place for humour. At one point Bowditch nudges Pritchard with a sly push from the bench. He lands on his arm then rebounds to engage again with his partner. At another point Pritchard appears to kiss Bowditch's belly but blows a raspberry instead.

The piece ends with Bowditch swept willingly onto Pritchard's knee and the two dancers enveloped in a warm embrace. Bowditch subverts any reading of her short stature as childlike. This is the play of lovers and not children. The work makes good use of the movement possibility of sliding, balancing and turning on an extended box.

*NQR* is a 35-minute work choreographed by Smith, Brew and Bowditch for SDT. The work explores small but significant differences between human beings in a series of loosely linked episodes. The title is drawn from an acronym often employed in the past by doctors in records of consultations

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<sup>70</sup> Janet Smith, SDT director recalls the reaction of a school teacher who told her that the work 'should be in your repertoire' (Smith cited in Brennan 2012)

with patients before a change in regulations allowed patient access to their records. It stands for 'not quite right'.

With a choreographic collaboration of three artists it is difficult to disentangle the particular contributions made by each artist and at times the different scenes in the work shift in pace and content without clear connections between them. Bowditch offers her own account of the process of collaborative devising. In conversation with Jo Verrent, who tracked Bowditch's work with SDT, Bowditch describes her role in the choreographic team for *NQR*:

During the process I felt like I began to take on more of a dramaturgical type role whereas Marc and Janet both crafted the movement in the studio. - Bowditch cited in Verrent 2010: 5

Bowditch acknowledges that she learned from the two other choreographers, Brew and Smith, both with considerably more dance training and experience, but also began to reflect on her own knowledge, preferences and skills:

I learned a lot about my process, how I work and what's important for me in a making process. I realized that I am happiest working on small groups of dancers and tend to work on movement from an idea or a concept. - Bowditch cited in Verrent 2010: 5

There is a quality in Bowditch's work as a performer that can be described as a capacity to project aspects of her personality in communication with an audience, a particular kind of stage presence. Benjamin makes use of this in the simplicity and impact of Bowditch's first slow movement in connecting with her partner in the *Angels* duet. In *NQR*,<sup>72</sup> the impact of her solo emergence from a box that opens the work is marked not only by the clarity and simplicity of her movement but again by a presence and vitality that cannot be ignored. Her entrance makes effective use of her stature.

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<sup>72</sup> Discussions of *NQR* are based both on viewing of a live performance at the Curve Theatre in Leicester in 2010 and archival film provided by Caroline Bowditch.

There is a powerful moment when her two small legs and feet suddenly hook themselves over the previously closed box. In the live performance at the Curve in Leicester, the width of stage might have reduced the impact of her entrance but instead the contrast in scale drew the eye to the white box balanced on a box of light from which she emerges.

A number of critics tried to catch the essence of the quality of her presence. Michael Watts (2010), in a mixed review of *NQR* when performed at The Place in London, talks of 'Bowditch's character reaching beyond the crowd' and David Mead (2010) writes of how she 'dominates the stage even when doing nothing'. In a review of the first performance at Dundee Rep, Mark Brown (2010) talks of the 'stark brilliance' in her use of her body in performance comparing favourably with the most memorable work of Graeae Theatre Company.

The critic Jo Begg (2010) in a review of a performance of *NQR* in Manchester (2010) noted her own response to Bowditch's body as one that was 'distorted, and unbalanced' as it emerges from the box. For Begg the image shifted to 'such elegance, a kind of unfurling, a physical re-birth'. She comments on Bowditch's 'fluid and lithe' body whether in the chair or supported in the air by another dancer. As with *Angels*, there was an opportunity to bring the work to the attention of mainstream audiences and critics who might be unfamiliar with the work of professional disabled artists.

Begg, in her 2010 review of *NQR* referred to it as a 'work which restricts those with most movement and gives fluidity and freedom for those with less'. For Begg it allowed all the dancers to find changed and new rather than 'constrained' movement as a result. The immediately visible difference in the physicalities of the disabled artists becomes simply a vehicle to aid exploration of the many differences between individuals. It is a world like that described by Cameron or Davies where variations in capabilities and bodies are variations to be expected.

Bowditch's interest in the ways in which different bodies engage with similar movement is explored in both *in The Long and the Short of It* and in another

short work, *Leftovers* (2010), that she co-created with Marc Brew and was performed at DaDa Fest in 2010. *Leftovers* is an eleven-minute work described in the festival brochure as an 'eclectic mix of discarded dances carefully gathered from the studio floor - each one with its own potential' (DaDa Fest 2010:34).

The work encompasses a series of encounters between a man and a woman each offering different possibilities for a more sustained relationship. The episodic nature of these encounters is emphasised by allowing quiet pauses between each section rather than creating moments of smooth transition and the use of distinct and identifiable dance forms: ballet, contact improvisation, contemporary, and tango. It is as if the structure continually fragments potential narratives and interrupts the formation of an established relationship between the two.

*Leftovers* begins with a *corps de ballet* of two dancers. Brew and Bowditch sit side by side in their wheelchairs with arms positioned in a classic ballet *port de bras*. Their necks and heads perform, in perfect unison, the pecking turning movements of the often-parodied dance of the cygnets from the second act of *Swan Lake*. The ballet music changes to a percussive score with an insistent beat. In this next section the dancers' bodies make contact using exploratory movement that is sometimes supportive, sometimes braced against their chairs to offer traction and resistance to the other. Explorations at times involve manipulation of parts of the other body, sometimes yielding to it allowing bodies to move together, at other times taking the newly found movement back into solo explorations of the surrounding space.

Bowditch at one point covers her eyes but stretches out an arm to which Brew returns to explore again where his body might fit or make contact with hers. They move upstage together with Bowditch using her silently gliding electric chair to initiate a slow pathway. After a pause there is a sensual passage, where she moves behind Brew with a slow sinuous movement under his shirt that reveals his lean and muscular torso to the audience.

Again, there is a potential development or consummation of a relationship that is interrupted. In a solo that eclipses Bowditch's small inward turning movements upstage, Brew occupies the downstage area, drawing the audience's attention to his powerful, long, reaching, folding and extending movement. There are moments when he finds the potential movement in his own body by pulling or pushing limbs into different angles and positions in space. It is as if he duets with himself, manipulating and activating his own body.

The last section seems to find a moment of ease between the two dancers as their bodies and chairs sweep in a sensuous tango that curves and entwines pathways throughout the space but ends suddenly. The work concludes with a final short conversation between Brew and Bowditch. 'My mother says if you try hard you will succeed' says Brew to which Bowditch replies 'I think I have succeeded. I think that I haven't yet reached my full potential' and then the phone rings' and Brew 's final words ' O hello mum' ends the work.

Whilst Bowditch notes a range of current artistic practices that engage with the nature of disability, she suggests that this not a central focus for her own work, which is 'not about disability' (2009: 11). The works discussed so far can however, be seen to be concerned with the sensuous possibilities of all bodies and the nature of embodied relationships between people. *NQR*, for example, offers a series of images of the visible and invisible differences between individuals and a picture of the wide diversity of bodies in function and form.

It is possible to identify a strand in Bowditch's work that engages with what is, or may be, inscribed on the body. In *Tear* (2005) projections of text and images are written over her performing body. Similarly photographic images of people and, objects and places representing important memories are printed on the robes worn by her dancers in her Unlimited commission *Leaving, Limbo, Landing* (2012). The stereotypical and homogenous nature of powerful cultural images of femininity are inscribed on the bodies of the two women performers in *She was Only a Knife Thrower's Assistant...* through the similarity in movement vocabularies and costume. In *Proband* Bowditch

approaches the subject of curiosity about the body and these different ways of imaging bodies that may be linked to scientific discourses around the nature of the fleshy body.

*Proband* is the title given to two works devised by Bowditch, a live solo work premiered in 2008 at Sunderland glass museum and a dance film, that was designed to be added to an information pack on *Osteogenesis Imperfecta*. The research and final works (both live performance and film) were funded by a £30,000 research grant from the Arts Awards budget of the Wellcome Trust<sup>73</sup>. The award allowed her to gather together a substantial team of artistic collaborators as well as the expertise of a biomedical scientist. The 8-minute film draws both on documentary forms of presentation, movement and imagery and more poetic images and metaphors in song, movement and glass sculpture.

The term *Proband* is used in biomedicine to refer to the first member of a family presenting with a genetic condition and marks a point of departure for exploration of genetic patterns within generations of a family. Bowditch includes some directly autobiographical material, photographs of herself as a child as well as descriptions of the impact of her condition on herself and family.

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<sup>73</sup> These grants were established to 'support imaginative and experimental arts projects that explore biomedical science' (Wellcome Trust 2013).



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Figure 5 Still from *Proband*

Figure 5 captures the opening image on the film. A laser beam traces a single and continuous white line of light gradually forming on a black dance floor a double helix, a model of DNA. As the laser thin line of light follows its trajectory it becomes apparent that it is wrapping round Bowditch's own body rolling around the pathway of the helix. The movement is accompanied by a text, spoken in a male voice that talks of knowledge and lack of knowledge 'something I know and something I think I need to know' and the complexities and uncertainties and discomfort in seeking to find what can be known.

The film continues shifting between spoken text and imagery. Laser images of scientific formulae play across Bowditch's body. Descriptions of her early childhood experience are linked to the apparent impact of different combinations in the molecular structure of cells and DNA in her body. Bowditch handles translucent coloured glass blocks, building them into a tower. She changes the positioning of the individual glass blocks like a game of Jenga and the changing structure and different ordering of blocks expose vulnerabilities and fragilities in the arrangements and balances within the structure.

Bowditch sits within the looped light traced lines of the helix and a scattering of glass blocks. She describes both models of genetic structures, and the shifting impact of different configurations within DNA and the related realities of the flesh and her body's history:

By the time I am eight years old I have had two hundred and fifty fractures [pause] my mother stops counting. *Proband*

Bowditch's later comments about the strangeness of statistics and chance elements are accompanied by simple but distinct movements of her fingers and hands as they explore, scamper, curve space around her and, inscribe lines over and around her seated body. The scope and potential of these movements is apparently constricted by the space delineated by the curved light lines of the helix and Bowditch's busy exploring articulations of hand and fingers never stray beyond these boundaries in space.

She talks of her body as not just atypical but almost unique in the world 'only two of us they know about with this condition; me and this other woman in San Francisco', adding 'well here we are'. There is an apparent paradox here, where focusing in on the unique qualities of one bodily structure at the same time draws attention to universal questions about what we can 'know or think we know' or 'think we don't 'know' about all bodies. The beautifully drawn lines of the double helix remind the viewer that the concepts of DNA and cellular structure can be seen as models, constructed ideas of anatomy with profound impact on how we live in and imagine our bodies rather than absolutes simply awaiting discovery.

*Proband* ends on a humorous note with the introduction of a doggerel song that succeeds in finding a rhyme for *Osteogenesis Imperfecta* in the line 'lay her on the table so we can inspect her'. Bowditch's of humour serves to allow an uncomfortable or unpalatable truth and history to be exposed about the objectification of a body and the medical gaze of a powerful scrutineer.

What is most striking are the various the roles Bowditch performs as researcher, presenter, lecturer and artist. She chalks information on a blackboard and speaks to an unseen audience beyond the eye of the camera

with the vocabulary of a scientist. She also explores this information and related ideas through the medium of artistic imagery and creative movement.

The film may engage with a genetic 'condition' but Bowditch is not the passive object of curiosity of medical inquiry the disciplining, categorising medical gaze part of a medical model of disability. Bowditch has in one sense an extra-ordinary body shaped by a rare genetic condition and she offers her body for scrutiny for an audience. It is, however, Bowditch who makes use of Garland-Thomson's baroque stare of curiosity and wonder, and encourages her audience to join her in that exploration. Here, unlike previous situations where people with rare bodies were exhibited as the object of the intrusive and curious stare of those attending the freak shows and scientific lectures it is Bowditch who is the scrutineer and guide, neither superhero or tragic victim but the object of her own wonder.

Bowditch incorporates moments of her own history and of the physical impact of *Osteogenesis Imperfecta* on her fleshy body. Bowditch is the explorer, the curious one actively seeking to discover what is known, what is hidden from knowledge and the embodied nature of that experience. The male voice and text at the beginning of the work speaks of the pursuit of knowledge<sup>74</sup>.

Bowditch is engaging with a conundrum. She has her own phenomenological experience of her body. It is a body for self. It is also a body for others and their scrutiny. Her experience of how it is seen or imagined in scientific thought is also a part of her experiencing body and the way she herself imagines it. It is a body with particular fragilities that stem from her impairment but it is also a unique body discovering other possibilities of movement and expression as a performing body. The subject matter is individual, specific, but the work touches on poetical and artistic form in relation to scientific models of the body.

Bowditch describes *Leaving Limbo Landing (LLL)* (2012) as her first work as a fully independent artist and choreographer, and the first time she had a 'piece

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<sup>74</sup> As one scientist commented to me the text offered a poetic and accurate summation of the nature of scientific inquiry as he had experienced it.

branded as Caroline Bowditch' (Bowditch cited in Cockburn 2012). It is an interesting statement considering her two previous commissions for Liberty Festival and for *Proband*. It speaks to her own confidence in the role of choreographer but also suggests her own judgment that the work was to be placed within a field of mainstream performance. The work engages directly with themes of migration, forced or chosen, the experience of settling into a new country and the space of suspension, confusion, limbo between these two worlds. Bowditch is placing herself firmly within Sealey's category of disabled artists choosing to work within a specific art form and with themes other than disability.

For Bowditch *LLL*, a commission undertaken in partnership with East London Dance, represented a major undertaking at many levels. It was her first engagement with aerial work in performance and her first engagement with a large site-specific work. The work was staged in the midst of three festivals in London, Glasgow and Edinburgh free and open to audiences who could come and go during each performance. Bowditch was working with a large team of new as well as familiar collaborators to create both a performance work and an exhibition/installation at the South Bank Centre.

Bowditch noted the extent of some of the challenges:

When I work with able-bodied dancers I'm interested in putting them in places that I couldn't get to. So the piece contains a three level scaffold. It's a massive set, including a huge wall of water and aerial performances I've never done outdoor, water or aerial performances before, but *Unlimited* is all about pushing disabled people through their comfortable limits. - Bowditch cited in Fulton 2012

Bowditch's vision draws on her own experiences of moving between worlds, of being a woman living and working in different countries. It is tempting to reflect that her experiences of moving between different fields and worlds as a disabled woman have a distinctive resonance. . When she talks of placing her dancers in 'places I couldn't get to' again this might be read through assumptions about what her body can and cannot do but she is talking of

processes very similar to that of other non-disabled choreographers who find movement possibilities for their dancers that they would not feel able to execute.

Bowditch drew both on her own experiences of migration and those of others. She gathered material through interviews in the East End of London with six men and six women who had migrated to the UK. She chose six women performers, two with training and experience in aerial work. In *LLL* there are differences between individual performers, the dancers and the aerialist, differences in height and body structure, subtle differences in movement preferences. Each performer moves through different areas in the set with individual variations of movement, using each other's bodies and the dangling ropes between two elevated stages to travel from spaces representing old and new worlds.

It is, however, the similarities amongst the cast that convey a sense of shared experience both among themselves and with generations of other migrants. This choice of an all female cast, and all relatively young, is interesting in relation to the material Bowditch collected from both male and female migrants. It raises an image of the vulnerabilities, energy and potential resilience of the young moving into new and unexplored territories, and reminds the audience that young women as well as men move into new and strange territories.

## **6.9 Bowditch's Journey as an Artist.**

Commenting on the development of her artistic work in an online Arts Industry site, Bowditch notes that 'it's your disability that is too often the focus of attention rather than what I am doing as a dancer'. For her 'too often' the 'directors, producers and programmers' assume 'when I am doing a new piece that I want to draw attention to my journey to become a dancer' (Bowditch 2009:11). For the purposes of this study, however, it is argued that it is important to pay attention to the processes that shaped her own ideas about her impairment and abilities. These have been shown to have bearing on how she was able engage with opportunities to progress her development

as a dance artist. In turn they have added to the sources upon which she draws as an artist to develop her practice.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus, of ideas and experiences that become a part of how someone positions themselves in the world allow for reflection of both the value of the disabled habitus for Bowditch and its limitations. It is when she encounters her first Candoco workshop that the limiting aspects of the habitus, the aspects that shape her body awareness and shape her beliefs about the body's possibilities, that become exposed and open to reflection enabling her to both experience her desire to dance and to imagine her potential as a dancer.

By 2012 Bowditch had created a career in an art form for which she had not originally trained and in a highly competitive dance sector. She lacked any pre-vocational training in dance and had to find that training and skills development in other forms: development programmes; periods of internship; exposure to the ideas and working practices of other artists and practical experience as performer. She can be seen to have been able to draw on just that range of other skills delineated in the Burns and Harrison's 2009 survey of the UK dance sector<sup>75</sup>.

Her career development required, on her part, an engagement with entrepreneurial skills, the ability to initiate and manage projects, and an ability to communicate ideas to others that were consonant with precisely those aspects of a disability habitus acquired in engaging with a range of public and social fields as a disabled person. These are skills that she had already begun developing before entering the dance profession. Her earlier training in drama and music forms part of her repertoire of skills.

Discovery of CI as a dance form can be seen to have allowed her to begin to gain skills and understanding of her body in movement and its potential as an expressive instrument. Participation dance classes, particularly in company classes with SDT, working as choreographer and teacher allowed her to develop skills to find and to refine with accuracy and precision, movements

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<sup>75</sup> I discuss the contents of this survey in 5.1.

specific to her physicality and yet able to be repeated and shaped for specific expressive purposes within a dance work.

Her own life experiences, as a migrant, between different worlds of work and education and between countries have become part of what fuels her artistic curiosity and work. As an independent woman who has travelled across the world, sampled marriage and living now independently her work engages with both the positioning and potential of women in the world. As an artist Bowditch takes these concerns, how she imagines them and finds ways of realising these ideas in the work she develops for performance. Her training, as with all dancers, brings her to understand the extra-ordinary qualities of a body whose movements and gestures can convey emotion and ideas about a wide range of human experience.

What differences does it make that the artist has a non-normate body? For Bowditch herself, her experiences have involved a re-imagining of her own body as a dancing body, and, for a number of critics and colleagues, imagining the potential in that body as an expressive body. As a citizen and as an artist she has had to contend with what tenBroek<sup>76</sup> describes as public imaginings around disability. These imaginings include misconceptions of what is safe for her, cultural images that equate shortness of stature and use of wheelchair as signifiers of dependency, childishness and passivity, and a dance world that still in many forms sees beauty and capacity for creative expression in a narrowly defined dancerly body.

Bowditch has been shown to be the direct beneficiary of shifts in attitudes and policies that allowed her to complete her education at tertiary level and what amounts to a set of affirmative projects within the dance sector. Family and important educational figures supported the formation of a habitus that equipped her to move between different fields of education and to be fearless in taking on the challenges that accompanied these. All of these experiences have, in turn, equipped her to challenge others to re-think their own attitudes

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<sup>76</sup> As I have discussed in 2.5.

and to give practical support to other teachers and artist to re-think and to re-imagine the potential in disabled entrants to the profession.

Until she encountered CI, Bowditch had so internalised ideas that dance was simply not a field for a disabled artist that this attitude was experienced as simply a question of personal taste that left her disliking dance and seeing it simply as not for her. The encounter with CI as form and possibility shifted her perceptions of her body and its potential. In her subsequent unpicking and discovery of her body as an expressive and artistic tool we can see an affirmative model of disability at work.

What then becomes important in appraising her performances is not that she has an unusual body but how it is used and to what purpose? It may then include her use of contrast, in the bodies of the two women in *Girl Jonah*, or in the *Long and the Short of It*. With *Girl Jonah* we can see how she plays with contrast and contradictions in bodily appearance between the two women to consider their positioning in a social hierarchy. In *NQR* she literally comes out of an assigned box offering a powerful opening image for explorations of processes of social ranking. She can be seen to present the reality of her body to re-present it as a performing body and to use it to represent a range of expressive and poetic possibilities.

An overview of her work begins to reveal questions of what becomes inscribed on human body and psyche. A trained eye can see in the body of a conventionally trained dancer the indelible marks of their training and company habitus. The ways, in which the body moves, the shaping of the muscles, and a bodily carriage show a history of a ballet or Graham based training.

With *Girl Jonah* we can see the inscriptions on the bodies of both Bowditch and Wright stemming from age and experiences, wrinkles, deeply incised curves where Bowditch's bones have fractured and healed. In *Tear*, the text inscribed on the bodies suggests action by another. In *LLL* the images of people and mementoes printed on the coats of the dancers testify not only to



the depth of inscribed memories but also to the mixed desires to be free of them and to the value of remembering that history.

Bowditch's journey can be seen simply as a matching between opportunities brought about by changing attitudes within the dance sector and wider social and cultural changes in relation to disability. What it reveals, however, is a much more complex picture both of what may allow a disabled entrant to engage with what is offered and what makes them to choose to struggle for position in a highly competitive world.

## 7 The Dance Artist and the Dance: Mark Brew

Mark Brew, like Caroline Bowditch, began his training and career as a performing artist in Australia. By 2012, he has come to form strong relationships professionally with both Bowditch and Cunningham. There are, however, distinct differences both in the nature of the work each artist creates as a choreographer and their personal pathways into the dance profession and how they wish to position themselves within that world.

This chapter begins by considering Brew's early encounters with dance and the formation of a dancing habitus. It then moves to consider his career and training subsequent to an accident early in his professional life and his training and development as performer and choreographer. His personal trajectory is discussed in relation to cultural shifts within the dance sector itself and the opportunities these offered for Brew's development<sup>77</sup>. These opportunities included encounters with other artists whose own original *habitus* has been exposed and challenged in their move across artistic and social fields.

The next section considers the relationship between Brew's early training and company habitus as a dancer, and his later work. It draws on a Bourdieusian model of the dancer's *habitus* as identified in Wainwright and Turner's studies of injury and dancers in the London-based Royal Ballet Company (Wainwright, Wainwright et.al 2006). Here the authors treat the world of dance as a field of cultural practices where management and engagement with injury is both a personal matter and one imbued with values associated with the performing body that are central to the field and those who function within it.

The final section focuses on Brew's choreographic work to examine the ways in which Brew's embodied experience of his reconfigured body becomes a source that has equal weight to his practical and embedded knowledge of ballet and contemporary forms acquired prior to his injury. It concerns several of his own works and also how other choreographer's have identified expressive possibilities in Brew's reconfigured body.

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<sup>77</sup> Unless otherwise referenced direct quotations from Brew refer to conversations between Brew and the author between 2010 and 2013)

As someone acquiring a major impairment in adult life Brew offers a useful comparator to Bowditch and Cunningham whose impairments were present at birth. This is true both in considering the formation of artistic pre-occupations and themes and their link to early experiences and training and the ways in which a disabled artist can and does engages with the dance sector.

### **7.1 Brew's First Encounters with Dance.**

Brew, like Bowditch, began life in a small Australian town. Where Bowditch stood out in her town because of her non-normate body, Brew stood out for his early passion and interest in dance. He was born in 1975 in Jerilderie in New South Wales, Australia. He describes himself as 'an active child always doing tumblers and rolls trying to fly like superman' (Scott 2005:7). He describes himself as excelling at sports and athletics but also acquiring a strong identity in the town as 'the boy who danced' (Brew cited in MacLeod 16.02.2010). By the time he was seven Brew had, with family support, begun his dance training in local dance classes (Scott 2005:7).

Pursuing this training further was to involve a major shift at the age of eleven. He moved from a small town with a population of 900 to the city of Melbourne. It was a move from a world of family life, attendance at a local school and separate dance classes to immersion in the rigorous academic and artistic training at two elite institutions in Melbourne, Victoria College for the Arts Secondary School (VAC) and the Australian Ballet School (ABS) where competition for the small number of places offered was and remains intense

The schooling offered not only a thorough grounding in many aspects of dance practice and dance criticism available to Bowditch only through projects like Cultural Shift. It also marked an entry point into a field of dance performance and the possibility of finding a valued position within the field.

In a paper influenced by Bourdieu's ideas on the field of fine art,<sup>78</sup> the philosopher Arthur Danto (1999:216) notes that the field 'creates the creator'. His point is that the dominance of certain values in an artistic field gives power to key social agents such as critics, or curators of exhibitions, to identify, establish and position an artist within that field. In an art form that can require long periods of training the values underpinning selection criteria for entrants have a powerful significance. For Danto:

The power of the field as a co-efficient of artistic creativity may be underscored by the fact that outsiders have no perceivable merit until the field admits their work somewhere into the structure. - Danto 1999:217

The world of theatre dance can be viewed as such an artistic field where control of training and the power to admit students to that training has a profound significance for the future artist. Entry into the field of ballet, as both a set of cultural practices and a dance form demands very early training and moulding of the body and its movement from a very young age. The entry point for training and immersion in a ballet training habitus for Brew starts in his small town but, by the age of eleven moves him to a totally different environment in a large city and specialist training regime.

The dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster offers a useful view of the nature of the intensive training offered to young dancers and its impact. Foster discusses the distinctive practices, hierarchical forms, and aesthetics belonging to different dance forms and points to the durational nature of this disciplining:

Typically a dancer spends anywhere from two to six hours per day, six to seven days a week for eight to ten years creating a dancing body. – Foster 1997: 236

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<sup>78</sup> Danto draws heavily on Bourdieu's 1987 paper on 'The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic'.

She argues that the disciplining of the dancer's body in training is a matter both of discursive and actual sculpting of the 'meat and the bone' (1997: 236). For Foster, the disciplining of the dancer's body incorporates not only drills and repetitions of movement but also the use of metaphor, images, and tropes employed in daily dance technique classes and aims to produce specific kinds of expressive bodies. The nature and construction of that dancing body will vary according to specific goals and values within different choreographic projects or fields, in Brew's case classical ballet.

Foster alludes to attitudes, tastes and emotions embodied within the different training regimes making the dancer's body a 'body-of-ideas' (1997:236). She suggests that training 'produces two bodies: one, perceived and tangible, the other aesthetically ideal' (1997:237). Brew notes the emphasis placed in his ballet school upon what he terms the ideal of a perfect body. Perhaps this emphasis can also be described as an underlying assumption about a perfectible body, one to be shaped, honed or sculpted through training towards an eventually unrealisable perfection.

Brew began his dance training in his hometown where he attended jazz dance classes. His subsequent training involved a number of dance forms including contemporary dance but on graduation from VAC he chose to pursue classical ballet training despite a conscious awareness of both his ability and interest in contemporary dance. He began his professional career as a classical ballet dancer with the Australian Ballet Company then dancing with Pact Ballet in South Africa (Wiederholt 2011:1).

He accounts for his choices as follows:

Although I was made aware that my strengths were in contemporary dance, I felt that having a strong classical technique would be to my advantage. I enjoyed the technical challenge of classical ballet. The focus, commitment and dedication for perfection helped me to strive for what I believe in and to achieve goals. It is a very disciplined career both physically and mentally. - Brew cited in AAA 2009.

Here Brew can be seen to identify something of that body-of-ideas to which Foster alludes.

Ballet, with its demanding and extended training regime, and long established position in western culture of dance holds a strong position within the dance field and is imbued with much cultural value. Indeed the dance critic Marcia B.Siegel suggests that amongst western critics there is a tacit agreement that 'classical ballet dancing seems accepted as the crowning achievement of dance art in Western culture' (Siegel 2010:92).

Its highly athletic demands can be seen to be of considerable interest for a young man with a proven sporting ability. The question still remains about the combination of factors that might have underpinned Brew's choices. He was a student who had already experimented with choreographing contemporary-based work on fellow ballet students and was seen as having particular strengths as a contemporary dancer (Berry 2009).

Brew chose to train in a ballet school with an overt commitment to an identified style, that of Australian ballet. His first professional engagement was as a dancer with the Australian Ballet Company, but he then sought to extend his experience by accepting work with South African ballet and thus exposing himself to its particular choreographic and company style and company habitus, In 2009 when asked in an interview for *The Stage* about his move from ballet to contemporary dance Brew responded:

My long-term goal had always been to get into contemporary dance. My natural flair and ability was in contemporary. I suppose I had to get the ballet out of my system. - Brew cited in Berry 2009

This throw away allusion to ballet and 'my system' can also be read as the kind of practical embodied knowledge that Bourdieu is alluding to in his consideration of *habitus* and field. In effect, it points to how Brew's 'system' and range of possibilities as a dancer are shaped by ballet and its structures. Indeed other possibilities and dispositions towards a more contemporary based practice disappear for a time where ballet and its values predominates in his thinking and practice.

Brew says nothing directly about the move from being positioned as a small town local boy who danced to being a talented entrant into an elite, and specialist, training establishment. He does note, however, that an important model for him has been the dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov, who he describes as 'another boy from a small town who overcame prejudice and adversity' (Brew cited in MacLeod 2010). Brew, the son of a mother running a post office in a small town, reflects on the very different values and possibilities offered in his town of origin, the elite boarding school he moved to at the age of eleven and the wider field of international dance which he has now entered.

There is suggestion in Brew's comparison with Barishnikov that Brew was faced with developing two very different ways of engagement, (or *habitus*) in the game of relationships in two widely different worlds or fields, that of home town and that of his elite training schools. Certainly one might speculate about possible periods of readjustment between school and holiday times back with his family. At home, Brew started from a relatively modest position as the son of a postmistress. In school Brew was a young man of talent living, and studying in an elite establishment where very different values would prevail.

Over childhood and adolescence experiences in these two distinctive different environments might necessitate an attempt to hold often contradictory positions stemming from what Bourdieu would term a 'cleft *habitus*' (Bourdieu 2007:103). It is reasonable to consider Brew would be need to find ways to reconcile what must have been at times contradictory ways of operating to advantage in encounters with others in the two fields

Bourdieu's views are particularly helpful as they are linked to his own experiences of the contradictory demands stemming from operating at the same time as the son of a postmaster in a small town and his academic training in an elite and highly selective boarding school that trained future intellectuals. Both Brew and Bourdieu, in different fields, seem to have embraced the reconciliation of two contradictory ways of operating in the sense of combining different fields of endeavour and interests within their subsequent careers.

For Bourdieu these involved an innovative reconciliation of a variety of forms of academic and political inquiry within philosophy and sociology. For Brew it was to involve an interest in the reconciliation and integration of various forms of dance expression; ballet, contemporary dance and some time later an emergent dance form based on the physicality of his own body.

Brew initially achieved his goal of working with the Australian National Ballet. The reasons he gives for leaving or not simply about the form of the dance practice but of the nature of the field into which he had entered:

When I realised my life, as a ballet dancer was becoming isolated and sheltered from the rest of the world, this sparked my decision to take up a position in the corps de ballet with PACT Ballet in South Africa. I wanted to travel, to see the world, learn and grow from my life experiences and as a dancer. - Brew cited in Berry 2009

It is important not to stretch the analogy with Bourdieu but it appears that experiences of moving between two worlds and an unusually early experience of independence from a childhood world had its effect on Brew, his desire to travel and to explore different aspects of dance and the dance field. Certainly, it might be predicted from the findings of Wainwright and Turner's studies of the Royal ballet company, the move to another ballet company would involve Brew in a period of dislocation when placed within a different company habitus that might lay open new possibilities for his own way of dancing. Brew's subsequent career was to take him across continents from Australia, South Africa, the USA and the UK. It involved him in engagement with dance worlds in New York, London and Dundee, Adelaide and Pretoria.

## **7.2 South Africa and the USA: a disruption.**

In 1997 Brew was in South Africa. A drunken driver drove into the car in which he was travelling. His three fellow passengers, Brew's colleagues, were killed and Brew sustained major injuries to his spine and internal organs. This event and the resultant reconfiguration of his body were to challenge not only the



identity he had created as a dancer but his overall conception of dance as an art form.

The extent and impact of Brew's injuries took time to establish and at first, as Brew says, he thought it might be possible to regain most of his physical functioning. He returned for a time to live with family in Jerilderie. He described in our conversations a positive experience with medical personnel, both doctors and physiotherapists. Friends urged him back into the dance studio to 'see how I could dance' and he engaged in some teaching and choreographic work with local schools.

It may be that the uncertainty of the final effects of the crash left both Brew and his friends with a strong sense of his identity as dancer, and injured dancer returning to full functioning. Nevertheless it is interesting that he uses the term *chow* rather than if perhaps also indicating the power of his previous dancing habitus. The impact of a major trauma and his proximity to the death of three friends is something he had to 'work through'.

The term 'working' through has resonances here with how it might be used by a psychotherapist working with anyone who has been through a major trauma. In a psychodynamic context it refers to a durational and on-going process an on going process of emotional understanding that begins with insight into the impact of experiences and the repetition reworking and final incorporation of its implications within conscious understanding.<sup>79</sup> For Brew as man and artist his the accident and its consequences can be seen as providing him with a profound encounter with the fragility and nature of human existence

Looking back over this period Brew identifies moments of disbelief and doubt as well as reflection on his relationship with dance. In an interview in 2010 he recounts:

When I woke up two weeks later, my initial thoughts were: 'I am a dancer, this can't be happening'. Then eventually came the realisation

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<sup>79</sup> A good overview of the concept of working through can be found in Sandler, Dare and Holder in .1973 particularly chapter 11.

of my situation, and that's when my dance training kicked in, and I knew that I would have to fight and adapt. During this period, I had to re-think what dance meant to me, expressing myself through movement and using the chair as a tool and extension of my physicality. Although I had great support from my family and the medical team, it wasn't always easy. Brew cited in Macleod 2013

### **7.3 Fighting and Adapting.**

Two dance artists who had made a successful transition from foot to wheel-based performer following a major spinal injury were to play an important part in Brew's re-engagement with dance: Kitty Lunn in New York, a dancer with a classical ballet training, and Céleste Dandeker in London, a dancer with a Graham-based contemporary dance training. In Brew's words they were part of a process of 'fighting and adapting.

Before his accident Brew had already accumulated cultural and physical capital as a professional artist as well as social capital, via a network of colleagues and friends in the industry. It was through a meeting between two of Brew's dance colleagues and their encounter with Kitty Lunn in New York that Brew came to work with Lunn in autumn 1999.

Lunn sponsored Brew's visit to New York and offered him both an introduction to her own technical vocabulary of ballet technique for wheel-based dancers and an opportunity to perform with her company in Manhattan. Lunn is clear and often outspoken about her dissatisfaction with much of the work produced by companies incorporating disabled and non-disabled dancers, opining:

What's still happening now is that the non-disabled dancers dance fairly well, and the dancers in the chairs get no training and are kind of rolling around with no technique and no kinaesthetic understanding of not only how dance technique works but how their own bodies work. So that became my mission, to show that disability does not signify inability and that you can have professional standards if you provide

training. I make [dancers] conform to standards, I make them study technique, I make them learn a craft. Simply because you have a disability does not excuse you from the process. Lunn cited in Velucci 2009:1.

Lunn describes her techniques as based on the transposition of classical ballet techniques for wheel-based dancers (Velucci 2009). As observers of her practice have noted, however, this includes both transpositions of a classical ballet vocabulary to suit the individual body of the dancer and also aspects of Graham-based techniques (Flender 2000:1; Waldman 1999). At the time she worked with Brew, Lunn was forty nine and offered advice and experience from the perspective of a dancer who had in her professional career performed both as a disabled and a non-disabled dancer.

Lunn's experience extended to a close collaboration with her husband Andrew Macmillan who had developed expertise in designing and building specialist lightweight dance wheelchairs. These were tailored to the physical capacities of the individual dancer and the ways in which his or her subtle transfers of body weight can be transferred to the movement of the chair.

Brew had the opportunity both to engage with Lunn's technical vocabulary and to explore what wheelchair technology could best support his dance movement. Looking back on this period, Brew describes it as a useful 'bridge'<sup>80</sup> back into dancing. With Lunn, Brew was back in dance classes, discovering what movement might now be possible based on what he had already learned in ballet training. He had first-hand experience of Lunn's own codified technique based firmly on a ballet aesthetic.

Brew returned to the daily regime of a professional dancer following a few days spent in one-to-one training sessions with Lunn. He attended daily professional ballet classes with disabled and non-disabled dancers and was engaged in the discipline of developing and rehearsing the dance role he was to perform. Brew created two works, *Access* and *Fly*, which were performed in

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<sup>80</sup> In discussion with the author June 2013

New York for performance with Lunn's Infinity Dance Theater in November 2001.

Brew's work with Lunn was observed and reported in several contemporary press articles (Kaye 2001, Flender 2000, Waldman 1999). The *New York Times* reporter Amy Waldman describes it as 'trying to transfer a dancing regime instilled since childhood to his upper body' (1992:2). What Waldman describes was more than a simple transposition of movements of the leg to movements of the arm.

She noted that Lunn used the precision of a ballet vocabulary with a process of 'correlating body parts' for each dancer so that, for example, for a wheel based dancer 'the upper arm becomes the thighbone and the heel of the hand the heel of the foot' (Waldman 1992:3). Flender noted that in class, Lunn demanded a precision of execution and timing of 'each dancer's variation of the movement be it *ronde de jambes en l'air*, *frappés* or *pirouettes*' (Flender 2000).

The process initiated by Lunn were noted by observers to involve moments of confusion and, at times, strong emotions for Brew where he can be seen to draw on deeply embedded values from his original training as a dancer. The dance training that Brew noted 'kicked in'. As Waldman describes what she witnesses in Brew's participation in classes, 'the dancer's constant quest for improvement and perfection propels him forward. And so gloom or not, there is class' (Waldman 1999:1). She notes in her observations of Brew that that 'when Ms Lunn says, "arch your foot" he instinctively bends his wrist. His muscles, he realizes, have a memory' (Waldman 1999: 2).

This memory is clearly linked with ideas, values and memories that are a direct part of his training experiences and a training world. Lunn began developing her own technique with the initial support of a ballet-trained psychotherapist shortly after her accident. For Lunn it offered a way back into dance but it also became an important central source for her artistic practice offering a direct translation of the vocabulary and techniques of her training, In

other words it was a way to adapt and to codify her new movement range to fit within a pre-existing aesthetic and practices devised for non-disabled dancers

For Brew this short but intensive period of working with Lunn allowed him to make a similar bridge for him to find ways of translating or adaptation using his newly shaped body to try to fit the template of his previous dance training. For Brew, unlike Lunn, this option of adaptation to meet the criteria of existing dance forms was to become just one of a range of possibilities rather than an end in itself.

He went on to develop his own artistic practice through exploration of the potential for new movement and artistic expression in the capabilities of his reconfigured body. In other words he became interested in discoveries not only about how he might dance but also, as an artist, a reconsideration of what dance might or could be.

In 1999 sources of employment and further training for a dancer with major bodily impairments were limited. Brew's period in New York was funded and supported by colleagues in Australia and by funding acquired by Lunn. At this stage, Brew could see no employment opportunities back in Australia (Brew cited in Waldman 1999: 4). There were, however, by this time established professional dance companies in the US and in the UK that engaged both disabled and non-disabled dancers and Brew received offers from two of them, Axis (US) and Candoco (UK). Brew accepted a contract from Candoco that offered him a regular salary, opportunities to teach as well as to perform, and a relocation package to meet the costs of moving to London.

Unlike Bowditch, Brew was taking up his first professional engagement in the UK with a dance background and experience both of performing and touring and had already begun to consider developing his choreographic skills. Brew had already worked with a range of choreographers in Australia, South Africa and then with Lunn in the USA. Before leaving Australia he had begun creating. He creating a solo work *Upside Down and back to Front* that he first performed as part of a larger installation performance in Melbourne in 2002

(Fairfax 2002) and later as part of Resolution 2005 at The Place in London (Phillips 2005).

## 7.4 A Professional Career in the UK

Brew worked with Candoco Dance Company from 2003-2008. Again he was to return to a familiar world of formal dance classes, rehearsals and touring work. The particular company habitus was directly related to the values and practices espoused by its artistic director Céleste Dandeker<sup>81</sup>.

Talking about her vision for the company, ten years after its inception, Dandeker in an interview for the *Observer* newspaper stated:

From the start I knew we had to be accepted in the mainstream,' ...Though there has been criticism from the disabled arts lobby, who didn't like the fact we were integrated, I wouldn't want people to think our work is about disability. The people who are part of the company bring themselves to the process; three of them are able-bodied, two of them happen to be wheelchair users, one has lost a leg and the other has one hand. That then becomes part of the work. But if you asked all of them if they had joined Candoco to work with disability, they would just look blank. - Dandeker cited in Stanford 2001

Elsewhere Dandeker (2002) notes that 'we were determined at the outset that CandoCo should aspire to excellence and to be seen as a professional mainstream contemporary dance company. In both interviews Dandeker went on to clear distinguish her company's aim of artistic excellence and virtuosity in performance, the subject matter and focus of themes in performance, from those of disabled artists within the new and explicitly political artistic field of disability arts. For Dandeker this aim of competing in mainstream dance<sup>82</sup> meant a

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<sup>81</sup> For a good overview both of the history of the company and of its values and practices see Benjamin 2010, 2001.

<sup>82</sup> The values and aims of the company can be seen to be shaped by those that shaped Dandeker's own training and institutional habitus formed in her early years at The Place in London and the Graham – based practice central to the training school and touring company of that time.

deliberate policy of commissioning work from already established choreographers as well as working with the company herself.

One consequence of this policy was effectively to exclude emergent disabled choreographers who had not had the opportunity to establish themselves in the field<sup>83</sup>. It was not, therefore, at this time offering Brew opportunities to develop his choreographic practice but it did offer him the experience of working with other disabled dancers in an established company, and an opportunity to work with a varied range of choreographers<sup>84</sup> and to experience their different styles of creating work.

At a public debate in 2011 hosted by Candoco a number of practitioners suggested that in addition to a value placed on virtuosity and athleticism there was a discernible preference identified their view of the artistic values of Candoco emphasizing the high value placed upon the athleticism and virtuosity in performance by both disabled and non-disabled company members, of the company.

A review of pictures of the cast of the works in which Brew was to perform while a member of the company certainly support the assertion of the dominance of a particular aesthetic ideal of the lean and beautiful dancerly body when selecting company members, whether disabled or non-disabled<sup>85</sup>.

As an artist who had trained and worked in other countries Candoco offered a point of entry to the dance sector in the UK. Brew brought to the work proven skills in teaching and facilitation of workshops together with the knowledge of

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<sup>83</sup> In 2012 Brew found that he was in the unique position of being the first disabled choreographer (other than Dandeker) commissioned to work with Candoco but also the first to work with Axis Dance Company, a comparable dance company in the US.

<sup>84</sup> A full list of works, company members and choreographers during the period Brew was employed by Candoco is available on the Candoco website (Candoco 2013)

<sup>85</sup> One contributor to the debate, Claire Cunningham, summed this up as including only 'the palatable disabled'.

dance and performance skills and practices gained through his original training and experiences of touring in Australia and South Africa

Brew joined Candoco as a performer for the seasons 2004/2005, 2005/2006 and 2006/2007. Interviews with choreographers and dancers (including Brew) included in the show reels for each season reveal very different choreographic processes and outcomes in the making of individual works (Candoco 2004, 2005, 2007). What emerges is the use made of the dancers' own abilities to improvise and devise movement around ideas suggested by choreographers and the ways in which each choreographer attended to the different movement styles and potential of each performer disabled and non-disabled.

The different choreographers with whom he worked at Candoco each made use of Brew's technical skills and upper body strengths, his capacity to convey a wide range of emotional depth in his movement and his use of balance and counterbalance with his chair and in his encounters with others. It can be argued that they recognised and worked with both that physicality and the aspects that were recognisably formed by his training habitus.

Use of his strong athleticism can be seen in the fast moving sequences in Fin Walker's *Journey* (2005). In Stephen Petronio's *Human Suite* (2003) Brew and David Lock, the other wheelchair user in the cast, move through the group of performers on stage at what the dance critic Judith Mackrell refers to as 'ecstatic' speeds, with multiple turns that exploit 'the grace of Brew's ballet training in arms that trail curving jet streams as he flies' (Mackrell 2004).

The accident had reshaped Brew's body. The lower part was paralysed and damage to his internal organs contributed to an upper torso where his flesh appeared stretched over the skeleton. Two choreographers engaged with this aspect of Brew's body and what it might help to express.

Athina Vahla's *In Praise of Folly* (2005) the prominence of sinews and length of Brew's arms are used to emphasise a quality of extreme physical effort. His



body is taken to the edge of physical endurance as the other performers pull at different part of his body spread out on a table to resemble a man tortured on a rack.

For *The Stepfather* (2007), a Hillbilly gothic fable, Arthur Pita selected Brew for the role of zombie-like, dead alter ego of the central character of stepfather performed by Jorge Certis. Brew's role in performance seems to enhance a sense of past present and future in the history of the stepfather. Often Brew's movement copies precisely that of Certis with the two men placed side by side on stage. The spread of emotions are registered on Certis' face as the narrative unfolds but Brew remains a blank faced corpselike figure, an ever-present *momento mori* as the tale of murder and manipulation proceeds.

At the end of the work the body that is hanged for the crimes of the stepfather is that of Brew. Brew's body is initially stretched into a standing position with the assistance of a suspended rope. His posture, enhanced by the appearance of his straining sinews, makes his body appear to stretch both up to the sky and down to the earth, inhabiting a prominent live space in the present.

The rope then becomes the hanging noose and the deadweight of his paralysed legs draw the lived body to its death. This potential for his body to convey its history, past and present can be seen put to use in Brew's later work. Here Pita exploits Brew's early bodily training as an almost ghostly presence of past experience marked on Brew's current live and performing body and uses it in creating the character of the ghostly alter ego of the stepfather.

At this point of his entry to the UK dance sector of the twenty first century there can be seen a strong contrast between Brew's career ambitions at the start and those the initial concerns of Bowditch and Cunningham when they first entered the sector. Brew was soon to establish his own company, The Mark Brew Company. He looked to a future where he would not only develop a choreographic and performance career but sought to compete at an international level His ultimate goal was to move towards a position as artistic director of a major dance company. These goals and the assumptions that the place of

struggle for him would be in a prominent and central place within dance can be seen as formed as part of the values and assumptions contained within Brew's initial training habitus in an elite organisation.

## 7.5 An Evolving Practice

Brew's period at *Candoco* offered him the opportunity to develop as a dancer, workshop leader, and teacher and to work with a range of choreographers. He was able to accumulate an important network of contacts within the dance world and to tour with the company. He did so with a confidence and established sense of himself as a dance artist with much to offer to both disabled and non-disabled dancers. In other words he was making a positive evaluation of the corporeal and cultural capital he had already accumulated.

Brew contributed to a number of initiatives to support the work of disabled dancers including *Cultural Shift 2005*, the East London dance pilot professional programme for disabled choreographers in which Caroline Bowditch took part. When it came to taking up opportunities that might further his own career Brew's choices were governed by his own assessment as to what would be of value in furthering his own professional development as well as the value of what he had to offer other dancers. A good example is available in his participation in a co-mentoring project provided by the Foundation for Community Dance. In the report of the project published in 2005 Brew explains:

When I was approached via Candoco I knew that I wanted to co-mentor with someone who was interested in choreography, someone of my 'calibre'. The fact that both Tom and I had a background in classical ballet was important and relevant to us both, and was what brought us together. - Brew cited in Scott: 2005

The project offered a supportive structure whereby disabled and non-disabled artists might learn from each other in the development of their careers. Tom Stapford, the artist paired with Brew, was a young dancer whose dancing habitus was formed both through training at the Royal Ballet School and

professional performance experience as a member of the company. He had begun to establish a career as an independent artist. In many ways he had an earlier training and career similar to that of Brew.

Reports of their work together cited in Scott's 2005 report suggest a successful and equal partnership in which each was able to provide sustained and critical observations on the work the other was creating<sup>86</sup>. They had a shared interest in exploring the funding and other resources for development of their careers as independent artists as well as refining and developing their individual artistic practices (Scott 2005:14).

A scrutiny of Brew's articulation both of his practice and the value of his own embodied movement shows a growing confidence and certainty about his artistic development, shrewd choices about where and how to extend his network of collaborators and the development of a distinctive set of practices of engagement with disabled and non-disabled dancers in his choreographic process (Weiderholt 2011). The Marc Brew Company website (2014) shows that by 2012 he had accumulated a portfolio of work both as choreographer and performer, teacher and workshop leader working both in different areas of the dance sector and theatre in the UK and abroad.

Brew was working with a range of performers, trained amateurs, semi-professional and professional dancers both disabled and non-disabled as well as professional actors. Beyond the world of theatre he has been involved with widely varied projects including the London Fashion Awards in 2009 and the Hand Over Ceremony for the Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Games Closing Ceremony 2008. The venues for his work have extended beyond those attracting existing audiences for integrated work or disability arts to more mainstream venues.

Brew was an artist engaged in identifying and developing his practice in a career temporarily interrupted by a period of recovery after his accident. This

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<sup>86</sup> It was also clear from accounts of all the co-mentoring partnerships that the success of these pairings depended on genuine confidence on both sides that the parties had something useful to contribute as well as to learn from the co-mentoring process.

need for any artist to continue to work on his practice is helpfully identified by Luke Pell, then Head of Learning and Development at Candoco:

Although there are inequalities in the level and amount of development opportunity available to disabled artists, the need for any artist to continue to work at one's practice is the same. An artist's practice evolves through training (formal, informal, self led) through presentation, through time, medium, collaboration, challenge –the more one works on their practice the more they know what it is or isn't.  
- Pell 2011.

An important challenge and source of collaboration was offered through a choreographic fellowship that Brew was to take up at Scottish Dance Theatre in 2009.

## **7.6 Brew and Scottish Dance Theatre (SDT).**

Brew's first exposure to professional performance in Scotland involved working with the National Theatre of Scotland. In 2007 he was engaged as one of the performer's in Adam Benjamin's *Angels of Incidence*, a work commissioned by SDT's artistic director, Janet Smith (Brown 2008). In 2008 Brew attended Dance East's Rural Retreat for future leaders bringing together a group of 'internationally-based future artistic directors, producers and company leaders' and as such did not have a brief that attended particularly to the presence or absence of disability (Brown 2008:1).

The combination of these two events led to Brew undertaking a four-week placement at SDT, funded by a bursary from the Cultural Leaders programme during which he shadowed Janet Smith. Brew was coming to identify both his artistic and professional ambitions. These focused not only on his development as a performer and choreographer but also on acquiring the skills and experience necessary to establish himself as a future artistic director of a mainstream dance company (Brown 2009; MacLeod 2010). As Brew commented 'that's my dream, to be employed by a mainstream

company for what I can bring to them, rather than for being different' (Brew cited in Brown 2009).

By 2008 Caroline Bowditch had already taken up her post as SDT's Dance Agent for Change. Many of the features of the company habitus discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Bowditch were of direct relevance to Brew. These include the varied nature of the company repertoire and the value placed upon fostering and developing the talent of both recently trained dancers and emergent choreographers.

From the moment of first meeting there was a strong personal connection established between Brew and Janet Smith SDT's artistic director (Brew cited in Brown 2009:1) It is possible to see a strong coincidence of artistic tastes evident in the work of Smith and Brew in relation both to theme and image and the combination of ballet and contemporary vocabularies

There is also a hint of a deeper source of connection of *habitus*, an affinity that may link to earlier experiences of the kind referred to by Bourdieu (2004:22) when he talks of 'these sympathies and antipathies, which pertain to the person as much of his works' but which 'remain entirely obscure and are often experienced as inexplicable, because they engage the two habitus concerned'. Smith's personal experience of impairment within her family of origin might also have contributed to her concern to support opportunities for disabled artists<sup>87</sup>.

Smith wanted to keep Brew's link with the company and a successful bid for funding to a new fund established by Scottish Arts Council allowed Brew to take up an eighteen-month period as Associate Director Fellow with SDT (Brown 2009:2). Dundee Rep Theatre (DRT) provides a home for both a theatre company, Dundee Rep, and Dance Company, SDT, and is Scotland's only full-time resident company of actors and contemporary dancers.

As a choreographer and performer Brew collaborated closely with Bowditch and Smith in creating and touring *NQR* (2010) with SDT as well as

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<sup>87</sup> A possibility that Brew raised in conversation with the author in June 2010)

choreographing work for Dundee Rep. It was work that was to engage him in practical learning of all aspects of managing and running a company (Macleod 2010:8). Brew had already experienced creating and touring work in collaboration with other artists. Now he had the opportunity for a deeper immersion in what he refers to as an enjoyable and exciting mixture of the 'artistic and the logistic' extending beyond management of rehearsals to planning sets and lighting (Brown 2009:2) in the realisation of an artistic vision.

His growing interest in the place of lighting can be seen clearly in the central part played by a complex lighting design incorporated in *Fusional Fragments* (2012) the work Brew created for *Unlimited*. With *NQR* Brew was also experimenting with combining a difficult combination of working in a choreographic team and performing as part of a cast of eleven performers.

Brew moved to live in Scotland whilst continuing to work both nationally across the UK and internationally. His fellowship with SDT provided him with both training and the opportunity to which Pell alludes to when he notes that for developing artists, the more they work on their practice 'the more they know what it is or isn't' (Pell 2011). It clearly provided Brew with both the knowledge base and confidence to undertake, between 2011 and 2013, two major commissions as solo choreographer for two thirty-minute works *Full of Words* (2011) for Axis Dance Company in the US and *Fusional Fragments* premiered during the Unlimited Festival at the South Bank in 2012.

In a pre-show discussion of *NQR* (Bowditch Brew and Smith 2010) Brew describes part of his research methods as a choreographer that would he further develop in later projects. He speaks of creating material based on his own upper body range of movement and then asking his dancers to play with the movement. The material specifically excludes any controlled movement of the lower part of the body. It is not, as Brew firmly notes, to give the dancers experiences of being disabled 'but rather to find what new possibilities arise from this specific restriction (Bowditch Brew and Smith 2010). This theme of restriction and of placing dancers, disabled and non-disabled in unfamiliar situations in order to generate new possibilities becomes an increasing part of his practice as his career progresses.

At this stage of Brew's career it is possible to distinguish two distinctly different periods of engagement with others as an artist: the non-disabled dancer in the formation of an original training and performance habitus in the field of ballet and this later period of development and performance as disabled dancer. Bourdieu's conception of the 'cleft habitus', the necessity for a 'conciliation of contraries' and indeed the value of understanding two ways of operating is pertinent here.

Brew's accident represented a period of disruption of his habitus, ways of moving and engagement with others in the dance field. At the same time strong elements of his dancing habitus clearly contributed to the respect with which he was accorded by the choreographers and artistic directors with whom he worked. This process of disruption it also opened opportunities to scrutinize tastes and to find the power and possibility in new and old forms of movement becomes an overt theme in his practice. It impacts both on how he works with dancers, disabled and non-disabled, and the elements he draws upon for the dance works he creates.

## **7.7 Conciliation of Contraries**

Brew applies these ideas to his own performance as well as that of others. *Remember When* (2008) is a ten minute solo consisting of two sections of approximately similar length; a black and white film of Brew filmed beside an elevator at the Tate Modern Gallery and a live performance by Brew who remains dancing in his chair in the area immediately adjacent to the on stage screen.

The performance begins with Brew wheeling his chair to point stage right of a large projection screen and he sits looking out at the audience while the film is screened. In the film Brew is shown rehearsing his sole performance, the fine and precise movements of his arms, neck and torso trace lines and pathways across and above his body.

The eye of the camera embraces a moving elevator viewed through its enclosing glass wall. The vertical lines of the escalator steps move in a

continuous diagonal line to the top of the screen where they are crossed by a vertical pathway. The gallery visitors who traverse this route pause at a point that allows them to gaze down on the performing dancer. At times an image Brew's moving figure is superimposed upon that of the escalator. There is no movement of his chair only of the dancing figure who sits within it.

As the film ends, a warm bath of light emphasises the presence of Brew in the flesh and the live performance begins. Brew restricts his movement possibilities by remaining in a wheelchair that he tilts, occasionally changing the position of the chair, but effectively does not move from a fixed location by the screen. To begin with, Brew's movements involve arms and upper body but gradually they involve lifting, pushing away and positioning his legs in different sharp angles to the rest of his body and chair. His arms torso and hands reach to areas behind in front and to the sides of his chair.

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Figure 6 Reaching behind and beyond

Figure 6 catches a moment of counterbalance as skull and neck stretch outwards and the underside of his jaw seems to push them further on their outward journey. Brew builds a vocabulary of movements of the arms that



may pass through formal ballet positions or find ever-changing shape and form. Whether the arms are joined at the hands or draped across the other elbow they carve and sculpt the space around his body.

Brew's arms and hands inscribe shapes in the air then bring attention to the possibilities of intricate folding and unfolding and the spaces between arms and hands/limbs. Some gestures are tiny, for example when fingers unfurl slowly and deliberately from his grasped hands, one hand lifts and places another or Brew rotates an arm in its socket then uses the other arm to stroke and smooth the exposed flesh Others are expansive as when he uses his joined arms to wheel in a circle towards and away from his body.

The movements reference different dance forms. For example, a rise *en pointe* is shifted from an original move that would engage foot and ankle to a movement of hand and wrist, like that captured in observation of his explorations in Lunn's ballet classes. One repeated movement uses hands in parallel as if commencing a jump. Brew's sinuous and impelling movements of neck and skull shift the direction of his gaze. His hands and arms catch the chair or stretch out to the ground or skywards, extending their pathway beyond a comfortable reach into space as if they aim to take the body travelling down into the earth or up into the sky.

As the solo unfolds Brew rolls up one trouser leg, exposes his leg and strokes it conveying a sense of its stillness and lack of mobility until it is lifted, placed and carried through space. It is as if he creates a duet with different parts of his body that he places and replaces in different positions in relation to each other.

Brew lifts an elbow, curves his hand into a claw that forcefully contacts his skull, driving it through space with an accompanying release into space of the other arm that continues the momentum of the original blow. The quality and dynamics of his movement incorporate references to both the precision and line of ballet and use of gravity, contraction and release Graham technique in his movement.

As he grips and edges his shirt over his torso Brew's ribs seem powerfully

stretched in two directions. . Figure 2 shows the power of this image, suggesting powerful associated emotions. The image is almost a pietà where the angle of the arms suggests an image of crucifixion and death. Movements of Brew's bald head and torso, the powerful grip his hands exert on chair and clothing, and the stretching also invoke images of Martha Graham's *Lamentations* (1930) where restrictions to movement enhance the expression and exploration of the emotions aroused.

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Figure 7 Stretching Shirt and Torso

In the live solo Brew picks up a bent leg and repositions it at an angle to his other leg as if remembering how it used to operate. His hands press into the knee, moving outwards and back again to the leg. The phrase ends as his hands rise slowly until they end spread above his head in a movement that

brings both legs back into the full view. It is as if he presents an image of a whole body in which each part allows new possibilities.

The combination of film and live performance subverts a simple reading of a body restrained or limited by impairment that might be fostered by the choice to remain in his chair in one area of the stage throughout the performance. It enhances a sense of movement across memory and space.

The audience is exposed to explorations of past and present possibilities in movement. In the film, Brew's image of himself in his chair over the escalator might be read as symbolic of movement in the world from which he is now barred.<sup>88</sup> Brew, however, turns his gaze upon the curious gaze of those who stare at his performance in the wheelchair. Brew uses the eye of the camera to stare back through the glass wall to those who shuffle past or stop to look as he claims his place in this public arena. We do not know that they, or the audience he invites in his live performance are staring at the dancer performing in a public space or with curiosity about his visibly impaired body.

In the live performance Brew places a hand firmly anchored onto the ground and slowly extends through to the other arm reaching to the sky, creating a strong vertical line met by the diagonal line created by torso and tilted chair as he gazes towards the audience. It is as if he grows and demonstrates new possibilities of balance and expressive movement that challenge the priority given to verticality in classical ballet technique.

As Brew presses from the fingertips and along his hand the move seems to gradually stretch and extend from one hand to another. In Brew's body there is a releasing and widening across his upper body. Each finger is separately extended in to the air and the ground. The image that unfolds with the movement as his neck and skull also extend into space is one of stillness in flight like a bird riding or gliding on a warm air thermal.

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<sup>88</sup> Indeed the reality is one of a concrete example of disabling rules of health and safety at the Tate. He was expressly forbidden to use his virtuosity in his use of his chair that would allow him to mount and travel on the escalator (personal communication (2012)).

The title *Remember When* and the ghostly black and white images in the film enhance a sense of memories explored. The combination of film and live body in performance engage with the history of a body, its memories of movement, but also hints at memories of the loss of Brew's companions and his encounter with his own possible death. We can see not only what emerges from the restrictions Brew places on his own movement possibilities but also a conciliation of contradictions, a merging of older and newer forms of movement.

In the making of *Full of Words* (2011) a work commissioned by Axis Dance Company in Oakland California it is possible to observe how Brew's experiences as both disabled and non-disabled dancer impact on his working relationship with the dancers. Like Candoco the company employs both disabled and non-disabled artists, eschews exploration of disability as central theme and aims to place its work within mainstream theatre, dance (or what is termed concert dance in the US) rather than within disability arts.

The artistic director of Axis, Judith notes that

We don't look at being disabled as an obstacle or a limitations...We look at the possibilities. There is a potential for movement that is radically expanded from what another dance company would have. Smith cited in Webber 2009.

The process of working with Brew on *Full of Words* is partly documented through dancers' blog postings and video footage on the company website. The video footage shows a group of dancers who have gained a comfortable familiarity with how their bodies move in relation to each other both in contact and separately (Grubb2012a, 2012b; Nonhebel 2012; Smith 2012).

Brew makes clear his aim both to familiarise himself with their forms of movement, in effect their possibilities, but then to destabilise them. As dancer Sebastian Grubb (2012b) notes:

He doesn't want us to just move the way we are used to moving. He is interested in breaking patterns, even if it feels awkward. So we are

doing a mix of exploratory, improvisational work and creating choreo. -  
Grubb 2012b.

This breaking of patterns extends to both disabled and non-disabled performers. For example one dancer, Rodney Bell was an accomplished athlete, playing wheelchair basketball at national level before he trained as a dancer. This provided a foundation for the development of a characteristic acrobatic and powerful athleticism in his wheel-based performances.

Brew draws on Rodney Bell's habitual and characteristic tilts and balances in his dancing wheelchair but then removes the possibility of movement across the stage by placing his whole performance within a large reclining armchair. Bell's balances then become movement motifs to be manipulated and transformed to make full use of the differently balanced mechanism of the recliner, to tilt and move back and footrest with movement on a single plane.

*Full of Words* offers an exploration of intimate conversations and relationships in everyday but private worlds each inhabited by a pair of dancers. The exact meaning of the exchange of movements is not always clear leaving the viewer to imagine the unspoken content. The exchange of movements suggests unspoken conversations that expose the nature of the relationships between the inhabitants of the rooms.

The ebb and flow and quality of movement is always directed to the other dancer whether a long or short phrase, or quick response. In a simple and uncrowded set, three rooms, three separate domestic interiors, a dining room, a bathroom and a bedroom, are indicated by table and chairs, a high freestanding bath and a reclining chair.

The work consists of three duets, each performed in a different space or room. In the first duet two women Sonsherée Giles and Alice Sheppard exchange bodily 'words' not spoken or mimed. There are moments of pause, an exasperation when Sheppard places both elbows firmly on the table or Giles retreats to a silent and folded position beneath the wooden table. Their conversations are conducted in movement away from the table. Brew

engages with the technical virtuosity of Sheppard in her use of her chair<sup>89</sup> for dynamic leans, curving pathways and reverses of position. Both dancers move across and below the table, using it and their bodies as places to meet, exchange weight and words and as momentum for the on going conversation. It is Sheppard's voice represented in quality and nature of her movements that seems strongest and loudest and comes to dominate in argument.

In the second duet Sebastian Grubb and Juliana Monin move in and around the bath, building a relationship with an underlying sexual frisson as they argue, reconcile and rest together in an exuberant duet. The bath serves to restrict, contain, support, and make possible a range of movements of their bodies both in contact with the bath and with each other.

The third duet begins with a solo by Rodney Bell. Here, something of Brew's own developed style of movement as exhibited in *Remember When* can be detected in the ways that Bell will fold and move an arm, wrist or hand or unite two body parts in duet. Bell presses together his palms then executes a movement where the two arms seem united in a fluid looping movement similar to that employed in breakdance. Here, however there is a quality of precision in movement that cuts and shifts the joined arms in space as if in an inner dialogue.

Bell is interrupted in his solo musings, or dreams, with the entry of Giles. The duet that follows remains ambiguous as to whether this is a conversation between a man and a woman that remains within Bell's imagination or takes place in the everyday reality of flesh on flesh. Brew enhances this ambiguity, and sense of ghostly or imagined encounter both by the ways Giles enters the space but also in the contrast between the precise and powerful movements of Bell and a quality of lingering and less precision in that of Giles.

As Brew notes<sup>90</sup> he was apparently the first disabled choreographer

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<sup>89</sup> An interesting commentary on the technical skills, phenomenological experience and expressive possibilities developed by Sheppard can be found in a series of postings on her Wheelchair dancer blog under the label 'dance technique'.

<sup>90</sup> In a conversation with the author, June 2010

commissioned to make work with the company. What amounts to a capacity to be bi-lingual, in other words to operate from an embodied perspective based on his career as non-disabled and disabled performer can also be considered a valuable asset in developing work with disabled and non-disabled artists. It seems that Brew could in some way foreshorten some of the initial consultations where a non-disabled choreographer is not experienced in understanding the ways in which a disabled dance artist may work.

During the period 2010 to 2012 Brew became increasingly sought after not only as choreographer and performer but also as a leader and potential role model for emergent disabled dance artists. Brew was invited to contribute to training and professional development projects for disabled artists<sup>91</sup>. In all these projects Brew was challenged to articulate the nature of his own practice.

When he started as Associate Director Fellow at SDT in 2009, Brew commented on both the implications of these opportunities for him at a personal level and also as a pioneer in the field. In an interview for a local Dundee paper, he expressed the conviction that he had a duty to others who identified as disabled artists within the field of dance:

There is always an element in my mind that, because I have a disability I have to prove myself doubly, not only as a dancer but also as a potential leader. - Brown 2009

Brew's development as a choreographer as discussed so far can be seen to give form to his earlier redefinition of dance following his accident as 'expression through movement' (cited Wiederholt 2011:1). His shift in a habitus, formed first in relation to his classical ballet training, is accompanied by a growing validation and affirmation of what is unique and valuable in

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<sup>91</sup> These included Gloucester Dance's 2011 Ignite programme, and Dance Transformations; a project for emergent choreographers devised and run through collaboration between Coventry University, Blue Eyed Soul Dance Company with support from DanceXchange in Birmingham.

dance expression based on his own physicality.

The argument developed here is not that Brew ignores technical virtuosity but rather that he extends what that might mean when applied to dancers with differing physicalities and training. He is curious about how the range of possibilities for expression changes when habitual patterns of moving are constrained or challenged. This challenge is not simply an experiment but rather one conducted in the service of realising an artistic vision in each work created. It marks a curiosity that has emerged from his explorations of the possibilities in his own performance as well as the opportunities opening up during a period of cultural shifts in the dance field.

In *Full of Words* we can see his use of the surfaces of the furniture that both challenge and bring parity to the individual movement possibilities when disabled and non-disabled dancers perform together. It is a device Brew uses to similar effect in an early version of *Nocturne* (2008) a work devised for performance involving Brew and other members of his company. The support and safety of the bed allows for a different range of possible movements for Brew when compared with when he is in his chair.

Here Brew challenges himself and the other three dancers to find different and surprising movement possibilities cushioned and shaped by mattress and bed ends. Movement by the dancers often starts from a point of contact with bed or between bodies, offering both a yielding and constraining base. This allows for a powerful and often lyrical movement in the work that emphasises extension not so much of torso but of leg or arm or neck and skull in all the dancers.

In *Full of Words* one can also see a use of adaptation or translation of movement from one body to another. Here, however, this is not to demand an adapted copy of a particular form designed with a very different physicality in mind, like Lunn's ballet technique. Brew rather takes the possibilities in one body, his own, and explores how another, with a different physicality, may develop those movements. Similarly in Brew's *Feast* (2012) a seven minute



dance film, he plays with the movement possibilities of individual dancers to create moments of unison.

Brew takes the kneeling position from which one disabled dancer, Stephanie Holt, habitually moves to develop a kneeling phrase for all five dancers. In this work Brew's own characteristic reaches are translated in the arm movement of another dancer, Frank McDaniels, who has flexibility in one arm only. Brew uses this arm movement for a phrase danced in unison that brings together the dancers in their roles as members of a warring family temporarily at peace with one another.

If we stand back from the body of Brew's work we can see a continuing interest in formal choreographic expositions, line shape and structure. While *Remember When* looks directly at memories and shifts in his embodiment his body of work is not overtly concerned with the social and biographical themes that can be seen in the work of Bowditch or Cunningham. It is being argued, however, that there are ways in which personal experiences and preoccupations and the history of Brew's own body become a subtext in his work.

In the first of two commissions for Unlimited, *Parallel Lines* (2012) he was employed to create a thirty minute work for a cast of six disabled and six non disabled dancers drawn from the UK, China, and Brazil. Brew worked with lines of connection, both in a literal and figurative sense. The set he commissioned that stretched ropes and bands to delineate dividing lines across the stage. The movement explores linearity in shape, movement and direction as well as fragmented and irregular patterns as he gradually moves dancers from solo to performances to encounters with others.

*Fusional Fragments* (2012) was created as a result of a successful bid for Unlimited funding by the Mark Brew Company in collaboration with the dance agency Dance East. It was presented as a work that would explore the possibilities of fusion between the forms of classical ballet and contemporary dance. As such it was explicitly concerned with formal choreographic

exposition. Indeed it can be seen to call on an audience with considerable knowledge and interest in dance form.

It was clearly addressing Brew's own experiences of bringing together elements of the two forms in his own current performance practice. The work is of interest not only because of what it represents in scope and ambition for Brew at this time in his career. It is also of interest because of the artistic collaboration between Brew and the internationally renowned deaf percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie.

Brew offered open auditions. As he required dancers with considerable experience and training in the formal techniques of ballet and contemporary practice it was highly unlikely that Brew would engage dancers with significant impairments. The current forms of training and opportunity in the UK dance sector had not yet produced disabled artists who could meet the criteria he set.

Brew described this collaboration not only in artistic but strategic terms. He emphasised the importance of demonstrating that deaf and disabled artists could and did occupy positions of high status in the field and were producing work that rightly gained them an international reputation<sup>92</sup>. The process of creation involved complex negotiations and management of a large team of artistic and administrative collaborators. Glennie, herself, was touring abroad and early collaborations were conducted via telephone and internet (Dreuden 2012).

Glennie used a wide variety of instruments, familiar and unfamiliar to create her musical score. What Brew seemed to have recognised in the first rehearsal with Glennie was the sensorial nature of her performance, and the touch and movement that produces the sound and Glennie's calm but powerful presence. Glennie brought her musical ideas to the rehearsal. Brew persuaded her not just to perform her composition, but to appear live and on stage as a sixth performer.

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<sup>92</sup> In conversation with the author June 2011

The five dancers remain on stage throughout the performance. The lighting design employs vibrating lines of laser light that shift and draw vertical and horizontal and oblique lines that reach and cut across the stage. At times warm light and shadow sculpts and emphasises the lines and shapes different limbs and separate and unite the moving dancers. It is as if the light delineates and separates spaces where the dancers can take refuge, become isolated, or private in their explorations.

Sometimes the light itself is sliced and separated as if through a crystal or prism. In the movement of the dancers in the spaces created by the light can be detected phrases forms easily categorised as originating from one or other the two dance forms. The movement is precise and the strong dynamics fuse with the recorded sound track as well as the live music provided by Glennie.

The precision of form in the dancer's movement is at times overlaid with angular moves of leg and arm that recall Brew's movement vocabulary in *Remember When*. It is a juxtaposition that conveys a sense of awkwardness and discomfort despite the underlying accuracy and fluidity of the movements' execution.

Glennie moves among and between dancers and light, almost as if the sound she finds in her instruments and her presence touches the dancers. Her own movements produce sound on a wide variety of instruments that are as much part of the movement vocabulary as that of the dancers. Brew shifts Glennie's habitual form of performance. He maintains her movement that creates the music but shifts its function and meaning. He does so by bringing into focus both the sounds Glennie produces and the ways in which she touches, coaxes or wrests the sound from her instruments.

At times Glennie stops and becomes a witnessing presence, a still observer of one or all of the dancers. She seems to hold a role not only as witness to the moving dancers but also to somehow symbolize a fusion of sensations of sound and movement. The synthesis of sensations of light, sound and

movement appears somehow fused in the physicality of all the performers offering the possibility of a similar synesthetic experience for the viewer.

This weaving of different sensations bears a strong resemblance to Glennie's own writing on how individuals experience sound. Her website includes an essay written in 1993 to counteract misconceptions about her own experience. It is 'designed to set the record straight and to allow people to enjoy the experience of being entertained by an ever evolving musician rather than some freak or miracle of nature' (reference).

Glennie writes that:

Hearing is basically a specialized form of touch. Sound is simply vibrating air which the ear picks up and converts to electrical signals, which are then interpreted by the brain. The sense of hearing is not the only sense that can do this, touch can do this too. If you are standing by the road and a large truck goes by, do you hear or feel the vibration? The answer is both. With very low frequency vibration the ear starts becoming inefficient and the rest of the body's sense of touch starts to take over. For some reason we tend to make a distinction between hearing a sound and feeling a vibration, in reality they are the same thing. - Glennie 1993

She adds

There is one other element to the equation, sight. We can also see items move and vibrate. If I see a drumhead or cymbal vibrate or even see the leaves of a tree moving in the wind then subconsciously my brain creates a corresponding sound. - Glennie 1993

Glennie's use of sound and sensation in her work is not in any way compensation or an achievement that overcomes a disability; it is rather a personal variation in the wide diversity of embodied experiences of sound that she can draw on as an artist. As such it represents an excellent example of Cameron's concept of impairment as a valuable tool of artistic creation.

She could also be writing about a dancer's phenomenological experience of sound and light and movement; all embodied experiences difficult to capture in words. In this work it becomes a shared experience affecting the relationship between the sound she produces, her body and those of the dancers. In her Hearing essay Glennie concludes:

I have tried to explain something which I find very difficult to explain. Even so, no one really understands how I do what I do. Please enjoy the music and forget the rest. - Glennie 1993

There is an understanding between Brew, with a dancer's bodily knowledge of how physicality and sound combine, and Glennie with the bodily knowledge of Glennie the musician, that is not easy to put into words. Both have also found themselves positioned by analyses that can at times focus more on the nature of that physicality and their identity as disabled or deaf artists rather than on their work. Indeed as Brew says:

One of the many things that appealed to me about working with her was that she had made a very successful career for herself, one not based at all around her disability but rather her musical talent. That's always been my aim as well. - Brew cited in Duerden 2012

There is also the apparent paradox that Brew is also in one sense seeking an alliance with her precisely because she is a deaf artist. On the other hand he was originally drawn to work with her through what was revealed of the place of the senses in her artistic creation in the documentary film *Touch the Sound* (2004).

## **7.8 Brew as Artist and Brew as Disabled artist.**

This chapter has traced Brew's early experiences and training to reflect upon how he has both deconstructed and reconstructed his capabilities and interests as an artist. To say that he has adopted an affirmative model of disability goes partly towards describing his process. He can be said to have both explored the capabilities of his impaired body and drawn on those understandings as tools for his practice.

Brew has had the experience of waking up in a body that is reshaped, functions differently and occasions very different responses from those around him. He has, however, had previous experiences that force him to respond to others and function differently in two often contradictory worlds. The shadow of these earlier experiences, the strengths and knowledge he has gained remain with him. They may feel a personal matter to Brew but they shape and are shaped by the worlds in which he competes are helpfully captured by Bourdieu's conceptions of habitus and the process of conciliation of contraries.

Had Brew settled on building on the techniques taught by Lunn he might be said simply to have translated or adapted elements of his original training in ballet and contemporary forms in other words responding in ways already shaped by his original training habitus.

What Brew has done is something different from Lunn as he remakes, reimagines and revisits his body after his accident as a new kind of performing body. He has drawn on his previous training to engage a similar level of technical precision and disciplinary rigor to his new movement. He develops, however not only a new vocabulary or lexicon of movement that takes account of his reconfigured body.

It is possible to envisage a training curriculum for disabled dancers that would incorporate dance history, choreographic form and practice like that of Brew's own. In this sense Brew's own performance work and methods of making allow him to make a valuable contribution to the training resources for future dancers both disabled and non-disabled.

Brew's habitus formed in his original training remains with him in the value and importance he places upon the daily dance class, the precision and attention to detail in the work he creates, and to his own mastery of a range of new techniques in developing skills of balance and movement with his dancing chair.

Brew's accident can also be seen to add to a process in which he was already engaged when he moves from the familiarity and certainty of Australian Ballet

to work in South Africa with his a spoken desire to be less' isolated' from the world that speaks to a habitus formed in his hometown. Brew moved with the conscious desire to engage with different relationships to dance and other practitioners.

What the accident can be seen to do is to cause a greater rupture between past and present possibilities that makes him reconsider how his tastes and dispositions have been formed. It literally disturbs his experience of himself and identity as a dancer. Yet out of the awkwardness and unfamiliarity that ensues he begins to discover or more accurately rediscover aspects of dance as an expressive art not previously part of his practice. It also allows Brew to draw upon what might be positive elements of a dancing habitus that support his future development.

It is this process of disruption that Brew draws upon to inform a choreographic practice that sees him pushing his dancers to find the awkward and the unfamiliar in a process that allows for new possibilities. He pushes them to play with these bodily dynamics before consolidating the new possibilities that emerge. Brew seems to look to find the fragmented and irregularity in the movement then layers it over precisely choreographed movement that replicates something of the original awkwardness.

The chapter has looked at Brew's biography and training and his ability to respond to opportunities that became available to him first as a non-disabled and then as a disabled dancer. It has also looked at aspects of his choreographic works and performances during a period of development of his practice between 2007-2012.

The work can clearly be seen as located within the field of dance. Brew, like Bowditch claims an identity as a disabled dance artist but does not place his work within a disability arts field nor is it directly focused on experiences of living in a potentially disabling world dominated by an ideology of the normal or of an ideal of the perfect body.

If we follow Brew's personal pathway and history it is possible however to reflect on certain strands in his work shaped by that experience. The sense of

awkwardness he creates, where irregular movement is layered over more fluid and precisely performed movement suggests again a kind of rupture that cuts across notions of perfection.

Brew's pre-occupations with 'line' in theatrical sets, lighting design and the movement of his dancers, is perhaps on one hand revealing his interest in creating shape and sketches of imagined perfection. In that sense one may think of that ideal of the perfect body he places as central to his ballet training together with the classical idea of line as balance and harmony extending into space. These lines can also be read as lines of travel and exploration that may stem as much from an early habitus that shaped his desire to explore the unfamiliar across countries, fields and dance forms.

Choreographers who have worked with Brew have engaged with something ghostly or haunting in his stage persona. They seem to engage with the appearance of his body and its capacity to convey something of his past history including history including an early near death experience. In his own work this haunting, engagement with past and present is most obvious and perhaps most consciously part of creation in *Remember When*. It recurs in a more subtle form in the ways the dancers are placed and lit in *Fusional Fragments*. Glennie becomes not only a witness to what is happening in the present but there is an uncanny quality to her presence that again suggests the return of something from the past.

If we look at the relationship between Brew's personal journey as an artist, and the dance field in which he positions himself between 2007 and 2012, we can see that he is able to respond to opportunities opening up because of shifts within the sector itself. Companies like Candoco and Axis have created work and opportunities for disabled dance artists to enter a field that engages with affirmative action projects like the co-mentoring and choreographic fellowship at SDT.

Brew's understanding, skills and interests are shaped from the perspective of his participation in the field of dance and the wider world as both disabled and non- disabled artist. His choreographic work and performances offer a



valuable addition to the growing canon of work by disabled artists. It is not just in his teaching, but also in how he engages choreographically with other dancers, that his bilingual approach can help to further shift developments within a dance sector which begins to create potential space for disabled artists.

Brew has a very different pathway into the UK dance sector than that of Bowditch and Cunningham. The work he has made with Bowditch. *Leftovers*, and Bowditch and Smith *NQR*, has some engagement with narrative form but his central pre-occupations lie more with abstract form. An understanding of his biography draws attention to subtle ways in which this history enters into his making process as an artist.

Australia at the time of his accident, offered Brew little to further his practice once he had his accident. The sponsorship he received, however, including that from Lunn herself, allowed him to travel to America where his work with Lunn brought him in contact with possibilities for future practice on which he could build. Brew can be seen as a creative person who made an early choice of dance as his means of artistic expression who found ways of continuing to pursue this possibility.

One might postulate that there had been changes in a willingness to support disabled people generally in, Australia as well as in the UK and US engaging with training and developing areas in a variety of spheres. The problem remains at to what is necessary to support and put in to practice engagement with the possibilities, particularly in the field of dance.

For Bowditch, effective training for her university teacher that would help him develop an inclusive practice was clearly absent. She was already someone interested in creative expression in music and theatre. Her encounters at university seemed to exclude dance as a form of artistic expression, but this was changed through her first encounter with Candoco and CI

Cunningham has had not just a very different pathway into dance but she has developed a distinctive and multi disciplinary focus in her work. Out of all three of the artists studied hers is the one that engages most directly with

narrative form, aspects of her own personal history and the experience of growing of living and working in the in the UK as disabled woman and artist.

## **8 The Dance Artist and the Dance: Claire Cunningham**

Neither Brew, nor to a lesser extent Bowditch places disabled experience as central to their work. With Cunningham that lived experience of disability can be seen to gradually take its place as an important role in her artistic creations. Like the other two artists she may considered as a creative person, seeking forms for artistic expression. In her case there is evidence from her school experiences that this included both fine art and singing. In Cunningham's case, when embarking on further education, dance was simply not an imaginable option for her.

With Brew one might use the metaphor of hybridity, of an artistic practice representing a hybrid of training and professional development before and after his accident. When one considers Cunningham's maturing practice, and the elements from which she draws, including the history of her own body, her training and career experiences, as well as her different artistic pre-occupations, another model can be considered.

With Cunningham a useful analogy drawn from the physical sciences is that of a colloidal system. A colloidal system is in effect a state within a state such as the liquid within a solid that is a jelly or the gas within a liquid that is the fizzing drink. Each element is part of an organic whole. Each element may expand or

contract but if one disappears, with a change in external circumstances such as changes in temperature, the whole disappears. What we have, in effect is a state within a state. This model allows for discussion of separate elements, elements that are also co-terminus both in their presence in Cunningham's performing body and the works themselves. When we examine her maturing work, bodily presence, what she chooses to present and re-present in her creative work, and particularly in the last work to be discussed, these elements need to be considered as co-terminus in the way of a colloidal system.

The honesty and clarity of Claire Cunningham's reflections on what has shaped her life and identity as artist and private individual is evident in both her performance work and her public contributions to the field of dance. The ideas articulated both in movement and in her writing and public speaking address the formation of a particular identity as an artist. They reveal how her changing views of her body as an expressive tool are shaped by experiences that both identify and challenge perceptions of difference and impairment in performance.

In this we can see that political philosophy alone does not bring about changes and perceptions. Shifting a disabled habitus and more negative to positive identity as a disabled person, as Bourdieu and Cameron have shown (as discussed in 3:10), is a durational process in which both bodily and intellectual work is required.

On her website, Claire Cunningham describes herself as a 'multi-disciplinary performer and choreographer' and lays claim to an identity as a disabled artist. On a panel at the South Bank Centre during a World of Women Festival (WOW), Cunningham described her work to date as 'largely biographical' (2013). She first entered the dance field as a performer in 2006 and this chapter attends to her work and the development of her career between 2006 and 2012.

This chapter begins by considering her biography. The account of her personal trajectory draws on information available in written accounts, public

statements by Cunningham, filmed interviews and information obtained in conversations with her between 2010 and 2012.

The next section considers Cunningham's engagement with training as stage performer, and latterly, dancer before considering her work as choreographer. It argues that these experiences offer a clear example of the ways in which any artist and particularly a disabled artist may draw on trusted collaborators as external observers when creating work with autobiographical material but may in turn influence those with whom they work.

A third section focuses on two solo works, *Mobile* (2008) and *Evolution* (2007) and a more recent work *Ménage À Trois* (2012); a work engaging a trio consisting of two dancers and a pair of crutches. It proceeds to locate these works as works of resistance in terms of disabled identity that offer innovative forms of artistic expression<sup>93</sup>.

The final section identifies aspects of her unique pathway as an artist to address questions of relevance to the training and development of other disabled artists seeking to establish their place in the world of dance.

## 8.1 Biography: Before Dance

Cunningham was born in 1978 in Kilmarnock, a small town close to Glasgow. Her education was in local mainstream schools and she notes in a public lecture (WOW 2013) that she had no direct contact with 'disabled people' until she went to University. Cunningham notes the importance of family support and values exemplified in the attitude of her grandmother who fostered the idea that application and determination could allow her to carry out and sustain whatever she chose to do.

Cunningham was born with a condition arthrogryposis that causes stiffness in the joints and impacts on the muscles. When she was two, doctors added a

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<sup>93</sup> Discussion of *Mobile* and *Evolution* is based on viewing archival film of performances provided by Cunningham and live performances in Glasgow (2011) and Dundee (2012). Discussion of *Ménage À Trois* is based on viewing two live performances: the preview at Platform, Easterhouse in 2011 and its premiere at the South Bank, London in 2012. The availability of the film has made it possible to scrutinise these works in more detail than those of Bowditch and Brew.

diagnosis of osteoporosis, a condition whose impact on her body was accelerated when she reached puberty. Medical interventions included fixing a bar between her legs when she was a small child and later the provision of calipers that were to be worn in an attempt to straighten her legs.

Cunningham's reports of experience of earlier and later medical interventions and consultations as a patient suggest those captured in the medical model and conceptions of the clinical gaze<sup>94</sup>. Cunningham sums up these experiences as follows:

I had grown up with the medical profession's kind of programming you as regards to what your body doesn't do. You grow up conditioned with that and it's quite a negative atmosphere to be subjected to.

Cunningham cited in Garavelli 2010

In her solo work *Evolution* Cunningham evokes early sensory experiences entwined with affective memory of the impact of medical interventions, particularly the imposed use of calipers. In an article she wrote for *In Dance*, Cunningham contrasts her experiences in a dance training that engaged the interested and affirming curiosity of fellow dancers about the uniqueness of her movement and physicality, and those in medical settings when 'as a child I felt physiotherapists were trying to correct how I moved' (Cunningham 2007:1) at the regular hospital check ups.

Cunningham's experiences show the truth of Davis' claim (3.1) that bodily capacities are not fixed but will vary for all people over their life times whether or not they were born with specific impairments. In her early teens, Cunningham fractured her shinbone when she fell off her bike. Further fractures to her shinbones followed and it became apparent that these injuries and the compacting of discs in her spine were the results of changes in her spine. These changes resulted from the hormonal changes of menarche that exacerbated her osteoporosis. The temporary use of crutches following the first accident shifted gradually to become an established necessity to support the weight of her legs and spine in order to protect them from further fractures.

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<sup>94</sup> Discussed in 2.3 and 3.6

As an adolescent her response appears to have been that of denial of these changes and she would return to climbing and riding her bike before another fracture would interrupt this. Cunningham sums up her experiences with medical experts over this period as being made into a 'case study' (Cunningham cited in Ellis 2011). Her initial denial of what was happening to her body coupled with her medical treatment can be seen to have shaped her phenomenological experience of a body from which she felt alienated and had important consequences.

It meant that I was someone who never paid attention to her body except to be aware when a bone was fracturing. - Cunningham cited in Brennan 2007.

Cunningham's talent for singing emerged in primary school. She is not clear what made her suddenly decide at the age of 8 to compete in and to win a singing competition in the school designed for older children. It suggests an early emergence of her creative interest that was fostered and developed in school and supported by her musical family. As with Bowditch the form that artistic expression could or might take for her seems to have been subtly shaped by underlying values and expectations of what is possible for a disabled young person. By the time she became an adult, dance was not something Cunningham had considered. In 2007 she wrote:

I had very stereotypical ideas of what dance was and the kind (physically) of person who did it. And that person wasn't on crutches and it wasn't me. Cunningham 2007.

As she noted in our conversations, her school sought to shape her choices of her future training. At the time of leaving her school teachers sought to shape the possibilities open to her and tried to direct her towards studying at art school rather than a music department 'because then I could sit at a desk'. Her resistance to this piece of advice was, she suggests, 'probably half the reason I went ahead and chose music' instead.

Cunningham's choice to study music thus suggests both an element of challenging expectations but also an assertion of personal taste and disposition. It illustrates the contrary influences of family habitus forming an expectation of rising to challenge and disabled habitus linked to a wider ideology of normality<sup>95</sup> that made a career of performance in singing, never mind dance, unimaginable and unthinkable as a possibility<sup>96</sup>.

At 18 Cunningham moved to study music at Trinity College Dublin. This move from a familiar culture of school and family in Scotland exposed her to new ideas and possibilities both in terms of her individual identity as a disabled person and as an artist. There Cunningham met Rosie who was, as Cunningham explained in a public lecture (WOW2013), 'the first other disabled person I had met'. It was to be not only a friendship that deepened and endured but also one that initiated in Cunningham a process of deconstruction and examination.

Cunningham describes how this early encounter led her to question her positioning in the world as disabled person and her own conditioned acceptance of that place (WOW2013). Her encounters with Rosie offered exposure of a disabled habitus and how it had been constructed. With Rosie:

I began to become aware of the idea that I was a disabled person something that I had denied and hated when I was growing up. I was incredibly ignorant about disability. WOW 2013

By recognising 'another' disabled person Cunningham was beginning to shift perceptions of her own identity and place in the world. Cunningham found herself challenged to reflect on how she was positioned and 'treated by society as a disabled person and because of my impairment' (WOW 2013). Her questioning moved from exposing how she was treated to laying bare her own 'conditioned acceptances' of this treatment and 'acceptance of my lot'. Rosie's articulation of a disability politics opened Cunningham to the importance of 'shared experience' with other disabled people (WOW2013).

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<sup>95</sup> See 2.9 for an elaboration of Cameron's conceptions of disabled habitus and ideologies of normality

<sup>96</sup> Cunningham had for example attended ballet classes as a child but only brought this back to conscious memory when, as an adult she attended a ballet class run by Candoco.

Cunningham was to gain this experience in her immersion in Disability Arts in Scotland in the early part of her career and in its later development.

During her childhood, Cunningham's ambition had been to be a classical singer, inspired by role models such as the classical soprano, Jessie Norman (WOW 2013). The Dublin course was underpinned by values that placed high importance on theoretical aspects of music with the aim of producing graduate teachers. Participation on the course challenged Cunningham to articulate her interests in performance and she successfully negotiated a transfer for her third year of study to the music course at the University of York.

For her this was musically valuable but was personally an isolating experience. Like Brew's ballet school, this was an elite institution and those entering the course had very different educational experiences prior to entry from those of Cunningham. It appears to have led Cunningham to face the kind of cleft habitus discussed in the relation to Brew.

The differences in background between Cunningham and her fellow students and culture meant that musical talent alone was insufficient when trying to build relationships and collaborations that went beyond formal assignments of work. In a conversation with the author in 2011, Cunningham recalled how 'people would work with you on a particular project but the day after it ended would walk past you without speaking.' It was as if she did not have sufficient capital to make her a possible ally for other students developing their own careers and positions in the field of music.

## **8.2 Return to Scotland and development as performer.**

After graduation Cunningham returned to Glasgow. She became involved with Sounds of Progress (SOP). Her involvement with the company as performer and administrator continued for a period of six years. During this time she can be seen to develop networks, accumulating social capital. She developed the working partnerships with people in the creative industry necessary for the development of a career in performance and became engaged with a field of Disability Arts that extended beyond Scotland.



The stated aims and practice of the company (now known as Limelight Music) were to:

offer opportunities; to those who experience difficulty in accessing conventional music training, to those who may not be aware of the ways in which involvement with music may enhance their lives, and to those who aspire to professional careers. Sounds of Progress 2007

Cunningham was no longer living in the world isolated from other disabled people but increasingly becoming identified with disability culture and entering fields of experimental performance practice.

The link to SOP provided her with the professional development necessary to any performer moving from college to the discipline of professional performance. It was also important to be situated within a company that overtly valued variation in sensory, physical or cognitive capabilities. As she told me<sup>97</sup>:

There was sympathetic understanding for what an Impairment might mean...but you were expected to be a professional, to work hard in rehearsals and between them.

The director of SOP Gordon Dougall made clear that the company aimed for 'a professional product', requiring years of proper training' to combat audience prejudices and pitying attitudes towards disabled performers (Dougall cited in Brennan 2001).

At SOP Cunningham not only had opportunities for performance in musical theatre but also opportunities to observe and to experience how, in a musical theatre, the lived experience of disabled performers might be given artistic form. An early example is her singing role in *Reminiscence Amnesia Project 1999* where she played the role of a diva who sang beautifully whose appearance meant that she would never be 'elegant enough to be a diva' (Cooper1999).

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<sup>97</sup> Conversation 2011

It also brought her in contact with key figures in professional theatre including writer, actor and director Gerry Mulgrew, founder of Communicado Theatre Company and the composer, musician, director and founder of SOP Gordon Dougall. Mulgrew and Dougall were artists who drew on a strong radical tradition of political theatre in Scotland as well as their own established artistic practices. Cunningham talks of productions that employed theatrical forms that managed to combine performance modalities and personal accounts of lived disabled experience without concession to sentimentality.

Cunningham's administrative work for SOP brought her into contact with organisations concerned with wider questions of disability, access, and equality within Scotland. In 2003, for example, she appeared on a panel at a Scottish Arts Council Seminar in Dundee on careers in the arts for disabled artists. This was a period in which she can be seen to have developed and to have consolidated her identity as a disabled individual and disabled artist within the field of disability arts and politics.

During this period Cunningham began to work with one of a number of figures that she describes as important mentors; the disabled artist, actor and producer Gary Robson:

He began to instil in me the part disabled experience plays in forming my identity, and owning it ... to grow from the denial of my teenage years to someone who sees it as an absolutely valid form of life. [pause] Not lesser, not negative, just different. WOW 2013

By 2013 Cunningham was able to speak with confidence in articulating the value of that difference in her own work and that of other disabled artists:

It is that difference that is essential. It is that lived experience of disability that gives a disabled artist's work an original perspective. I have enjoyed embracing that in my work. WOW 2013

In this early period of development she was developing an artistic practice. She was both seeking opportunities for performance and exploring what kind of performer she could or wanted to be. Her work had gained critical acclaim

(Cooper 1999), and she had established a secure position in a developing field of Disability Arts in Scotland.

As a professional artist, however, opportunities to work and to develop her career were still limited. As Cunningham points out, during this period, the offers of other performance were 'sporadic' and 'the only people offering it to me were disability companies' (2007:1). After some time she also realised that 'I was consistently working with the same people and largely playing to the same audiences. Preaching to the converted' (2007:1). Her experience seems both to highlight the lack of interest by mainstream cultural institutions in the work of disabled artists and a challenge to Benjamin's claim on penetration and influence of mainstream performance by disabled artists at this time.

### **8.3 Capital and Investment: a Stocktaking Period.**

Cunningham trained as a singer but her perceptions of attitudes towards her atypical body positioned her, on graduation, as an outsider to the fields of mainstream performance in music, dance and theatre. Her subsequent professional experience as performer and administrator with Sounds of Progress allowed her to gain knowledge, professional experience, and contacts as well as a respected position within the field of Disabled Arts in Scotland.

At this point Cunningham was, taking stock of the assets she had accumulated and considering how she might capitalise on them to extend her career as artist and a performer<sup>98</sup>. She had started with a limited physical capital to invest in a mainstream musical field that placed value on particular physicalities. This lack of capital made it difficult for her to invest her technical competence as a singer in development of a performance career.

She gradually began to accumulate social and cultural capital in a field of disability arts. A field where physical capital, in the form of a disabled body, its particular competencies and technical abilities, is a central and valued variation of symbolic capital to be combined with artistic capital. Most

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<sup>98</sup> A discussion of different forms of capital and their relationship to the performing arts is provided in 3.10

importantly she was accumulating social capital in the form of a social network that included fellow artists working in different art forms.

While working with Comunicado Theatre Company Cunningham had some first-hand experience of how aerial work may be incorporated in theatrical productions (The Scotsman 2011). It occurred to her that the upper body strength she had developed might allow her to train as an aerialist. This represented a rethinking of a bodily aspect that Cunningham had always 'thought of as unfeminine' (Cunningham cited in The Scotsman 2011) and revisiting it as a potential asset of value in pursuing her career as a performer.

This use of the term unfeminine in relation to her body and the link between cultural forms of femininity and personal perceptions of feminine desire and desirability is an issue that Cunningham was to return to in her 2012 work of *Ménage À Trois*. Here Cunningham is talking perhaps less about impairment and its effects but more about questions to do with the internalisation of cultural constructions of the female body and what makes it a desirable body.

Cunningham sought specialist training in aerial work. This initial move from musical theatre to aerial work was to open up an unexpected pathway into dance performance and choreography and the field of dance. By 2004 she had acquired sufficient skill in aerial work to successfully audition for Blue Eyed Soul Dance Company in Shrewsbury, who were looking for disabled artists with aerial skills for a new production.

This opportunity for performance using aerial skills was to introduce her not only to the possibility of dance as a form of artistic expression but to act as a bridge into a career as both performer and choreographer as was her performance work with Gary Robson. By 2008 Cunningham had devised and performed two solo dance works, *Evolution* and *Mobile*, and was beginning a tour in a work directed by Gary Robson *Sputnik: A Project of Possibilities* (2008).

## 8.4 Moving into New Fields of Performance

In *Sputnik*, Cunningham performed the role of a young woman, Jane Janes, about to quit the earth in a machine described by Robson as one that ‘fused with her body and soul will transport her to another place’ (cited in Brennan 2000). It offers an example not only of the skills and performance quality that Robson saw in her ability to play the role but also Cunningham’s participation in a performance work that engaged directly with aspects of a disabling world.

Robson’s text for Jane Janes also gives form to sentiments of direct relevance to Cunningham as an aspirant artist.

Publicity for a 2008 programming of the work contains the following passage:

I will develop a project for living away from the earth. If the project I create has endless possibilities and is powered by not just my body but my spirit, given the right place and the right time, my life could begin again..... Quite simply if my project is in the right place at the right time then anything is possible. Jane Janes cited in *Without Walls* 2008.

A blog posted in the name of Jane Janes draws attention to the ways in there are societal pressures to ‘normalise’ the bodies of children born with impairments. The blog speaks of a museum visit during which Janes examines a series of prosthetic devices. Janes’ responses to viewing these devices and the impact on those forced to wear them bear a strong resemblance to accounts by Thalidomide survivors of distressing attempts to make them wear prosthetic arms and legs.<sup>99</sup>

I was shown the peculiar harnesses, straps and stumps that were intended to transform a bunch of sick children’s lives. .

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<sup>99</sup> A very clear account of these experiences with prosthetics of both herself and other children who were thalidomide survivors can be found in Louise Medus’ autobiographical writing (Medus and Swain 2009).

These mechanical contraptions smelt of leather and utility, a fastidious functionary's sketch of human possibility that by their sweaty practicality removed all possibility of life. I didn't need to be told that not one of the children used or cared for them.

I knew then what I must create couldn't be like this. It must escape the chains of practicality. Jane Janes' Blog March3, 2009

Here Robson, through the character of Jane Janes, touches on a range of themes relating to both how ideas of disability and normality are constructed and the consequences for individuals. The prosthetics described in the blog post bear no relationship to the desires, imaginings or capacities of the children on whom they are imposed.

The machine Jane Janes constructs on stage is both part of Jane Janes' creation and part of realising the journeys she wishes to embark upon. It represents a construction, a technology that emerges from the collaboration between Jane and other characters. It is a technology that enhances rather than destroys the possibilities for a human. Like Icarus, Jane Janes flies on her wished for journey. Here, however, the wings aid a journey that starts from a creative search with a co-traveller rather than the hubris that brought Icarus too close to a destructive sun, melted his wings and sent him to his death.

In the unfolding of Robson's fable the central character finds new possibilities where Jane's identifies her dreams and desires, changes her 'ways of looking at things' with the belief that 'quite simply if my project is in the right place at the right time then anything is possible' (*Sputnik*).

Cunningham, as Jane, enters and leaves the space occupied by the machine/sculpture with a quiet and simple gait that uses the practical supportive possibilities of her crutches. Her impairment is neither disguised nor exaggerated. The crutches come with her in the building of a machine that is both a supportive structure for her explorations and co-traveller in her imaginings. Robson uses one story about one character but like all good fables it talks to more universal experience in its subject matter.

It also offers a powerful metaphor for Cunningham's changing relationship with her crutches as mobility aids, and choices to engage them as aesthetic objects, shifting her perceptions of the crutches in relation to her own body and creative imagination.

This next section considers some of the elements that came together in the right place and right time for Cunningham as an emergent dance artist.

## **8.5 Entering Dance: The Right Place and the Right Time.**

Cunningham joined the now-disbanded integrated company Blue Eyed Soul Dance Company in Shrewsbury in 2004 to work with the American choreographer Jess Curtis in two separate works. *Touch/Don't Touch* (2005) a duet between a man and a woman with a movement score that drew both on contact improvisation and aerial based movement through two suspended silk loops. In *Catch* (2005), an eighteen-minute work, Cunningham was one of a cast of five women who all performed suspended above the ground by individual aerial harnesses.

The encounter with Curtis, (and indeed for Curtis himself<sup>100</sup>), was a significant one for Cunningham that marked an entry to her development and identity as dancer. She likened their early relationship to a process of breaking in a horse (WOW 2013) with Cunningham as reluctant colt who declared firmly on first meeting him 'Ah'm no a dancer. I don't dance'. Curtis proved a sensitive handler who saw potential not just in Cunningham's aerial skills but also in her habitual and distinctive balancing and use of her crutches. Curtis introduced Cunningham to dance techniques based on CI. Unlike Bowditch's positive first encounter with CI this was initially a difficult experience for Cunningham 'quite an overload mentally and physically' (Cunningham 2007).

For Cunningham, a disabled scot, moreover one with little direct experience of dance, a medium that involved exchange of weight and balance between participants jarred with cultural and personal habits of avoidance of physical contact. Cunningham carefully left her crutches at the edge of the dance floor

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<sup>100</sup> For an account of Curtis' experiences both with Cunningham and other disabled dance artists see Curtis 2007a.

thinking that they might 'get in the way', and 'that they might hurt the other dancer' (Cunningham 2007).

It was what she did, without conscious thought, in the breaks between rehearsals when she picked those crutches up and her habitual use of her crutches, to sit, to balance or to pass the time that drew Curtis' attention: 'I thought that everyone who used crutches long-term did this. Apparently not' (Cunningham 2007).

With the benefit of hindsight, Cunningham recalls her long time experiment of movement with crutches in her everyday life:

I have always done this thing where I use my crutches as a seat when I am waiting to cross the road or for a lift. And I used to lift my legs off the ground to see how long I could balance. I was beginning to create things that have been integrated into the style I developed but I wasn't aware of it at the time. - Cunningham cited in Garivelli 2010

Curtis, an experienced dancer and choreographer, was drawing attention to virtuosity and a skill upon which Cunningham might draw as a performer. He encouraged Cunningham to experiment with movement on her crutches that was later incorporated in the earlier part of the duet. This stimulated her own interest in her habitual use of her crutches and in her words: 'that was the beginning of my learning to dance' (Cunningham 2007).

Cunningham continued to perform in *Catch* and *Touch/Don't Touch* with a touring schedule that continued into 2007. Her artistic collaborations with Curtis were to develop to contribute to her growth not just as performer in her engagement with his new company, Jess Curtis/Gravity, but also with his mentoring support and contributions, to her emergence as a choreographer. At this early stage the Blue Eyed Soul collaboration sparked her interest in dance.

By coincidence, just as she was thinking about expanding her skills in dance, the US installation artist and dancer Bill Shannon came to run a series of workshops in Rutherglen the South Lanarkshire town where Cunningham was



living and Cunningham had contact with Shannon. Bill Shannon, a.k.a. the Crutch Master, had developed and codified his own distinctive dance vocabulary using crutches in combination with skateboarding and forms of street dance including breakdancing. (What Is What 2013). Her contact with Shannon suggested that he might offer one of a number of elements that might help her explore new avenues in her artistic practice.

At this point in her career we can see how shifts in wider fields, including arts management coincided with shifts in Cunningham's own shifts in thinking about her career development. The first decade of the twenty first century was a period marked by expansion of funding to the arts in Scotland and an interest in the changing place of disabled artists. Cunningham made an application for career development funding without any expectation of success but thought it might bring her interest in dance to the attention of funders.

To her astonishment she was awarded a £30,000 Creative Scotland grant. The nature of the funding allowed her a year of research and development with no pressure to create any work as final product. The funding was used to allow her to spend time studying, (with Shannon in the US and Kally Lloyd-Jones in Scotland), and studio time and space in which to experiment and develop new performances.

## **8.6 Re-finding a Body**

This period was not simply one of developing techniques, it was also one of a reconsideration of the very nature and possibilities within her body and her conditioned attitudes towards it. In conversation in 2011 she described her bodily posture at the time she first met Curtis as 'hunched up like an old lady'. It is a description that vividly evokes possibly internalised associations between osteoporosis and post-menopausal women. Cunningham was also describing a habitual posture and way of presenting herself in the world that bears close comparison with Bourdieu's conception of bodily hexis<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> For discussion of this concept see 3.10.

For Cunningham what became important for her was not a training in Shannon's coded technique but Shannon's encouragement for Cunningham to 'name my own movements' and to explore their place within her own artistic vision. He introduced her to basic elements of stagecraft such as how to enter and to leave a stage. These were skills apparently part of her previous experience with SOP.

These elements of stagecraft acquired a different meaning when actively employed to engage audiences to look directly at her at her rather than to avert their gaze and simply to listen to her singing. Extending her range as a performer involved a re-visiting of her relationship to her body and its use in her singing performances as she recounts:

I didn't want audiences to see me or look at the way I walked. It was the song that mattered and nothing else. So I minimised any movement on stage — walk on, sing, and walk off. - Cunningham 2007.

It can also be seen as exposing elements of a disabled habitus, where concepts of caution, risk and failure and associated affects might be as much a matter of how her body had been treated in encounters with medical professionals as the actual risk involved.

Working with another performer with a physical impairment also allowed her to reflect on how she thought about risk in relation to her body. He made her realise her caution in exploring movement with the underlying habitual thought that 'I cannot fall' (Cunningham cited in Brennan 2007). Shannon encouraged her, rather than to strive to prevent a fall, to work slowly, to become aware of how she can find moments of balance and to discover ways to fall that do not risk fractures. It led her to realise that:

You haven't failed if you fall especially if you learn from it. When you put that mind set into practice you start to think of having control of your body and of your movement. Cunningham cited in Brennan 2007

In other words Cunningham had been begun to disentangle a practical matter, how not to injure herself, from an emotional matter, how to avoid a shameful experience.

Cunningham was beginning a training process that explored the movement possibilities of her body and its potential as an expressive body in performance. This process itself, the making and remaking of bodily posture and movement, provided rich material for her future choreographic work.

In the summer of 2006 she worked one to one with Kally Lloyd -Jones, a dance performer, choreographer and choreologist who works as movement director in the field of opera as well as directing and performing with her own company, Chordelia Dance Theatre, Lloyd Jones offered training informed by her experiences of exploring movement with performers trained in performance disciplines outside dance.

The agreed aim of this training was to devise ways of building strength and stamina to support Cunningham's movement explorations with crutches. The intention was to find ways of warming up, stretching and cooling down as well as moving that worked with, rather than against, the capacities of Cunningham's body. It quickly became clear that exercises undertaken when standing added to, rather than reduced, muscular tensions across her body. Together they devised a programme of floor barre exercises that allowed the weight of the body to be supported by lying on the floor (Cunningham 2007).

Cunningham was participating in a process requiring her to change a long established habit of ignoring her body, provoked by the attention others placed on the malfunctioning of specific parts her body. Now she was shifting to a conscious focus on and awareness of the whole of her body. Reflecting back on her work with Lloyd -Jones, Cunningham (2007) describes the experience as physically and emotionally demanding. She notes that it was at times 'upsetting (but in a good way)' of preconceptions and beliefs about her embodied sense of self (Cunningham 2007). As she puts it 'we found out so many fascinating the way my body had been working' (Cunningham 2007).

This fascination with how her body was moving was supported by physical changes that resulted from the training. Cunningham cites the example of noticing the impact of the exercises the development of leg muscles that resulted from the floor barre exercises, 'they looked dramatically different to me—not like my own legs at all'. One day she thought:

'Okay how do my legs feel ... strong." In my life I had never associated, or expected to associate this word with my legs'. Cunningham 2007.

In this process of bringing awareness to her body and its capacities Cunningham draws clear parallels between her embodied experience in her training experiences with dancers and her experiences with medical personnel but with different consequences:

There is a strange similarity to the way I was treated by the doctors but the mentality and the touch is different. Doctors would point out what is wrong, how things did not work, whereas dancers are looking at my body and saying "Wow! That's interesting ... your leg does this"? Emotionally it has a huge impact. Dancers, I feel, am looking at how my body already works and develop that, while, as a child I felt physiotherapists were trying to correct how I moved. - Cunningham 2007

In each of these examples Cunningham is talking about bringing attention to particular areas of her body but also bringing into conscious awareness associated emotional affects. Her training with Lloyd-Jones and experiences with Curtis can be seen as offering new possibilities of phenomenological engagement with her body. Cunningham described how Curtis introduced her to dance images of spiralling muscular interconnections across the body to provide source of momentum for movement (2011).

These images that Cunningham found so helpful can be seen to challenge habitual movement patterns engendered by medical practices that scrutinised her as a series of separate parts. Cunningham noted that in the past 'I would go from lying to sitting to standing... thinking press on hand here, press on foot there but using spirals and momentum is a different process'.

The history of discovering this difference in quality and fluidity of movement Cunningham describes can be seen in a movement sequence she develops in *Mobile*. Cunningham moves between and amongst a floor filled by crutches. She begins with a series of separate movements placing hand, then forearm then hand and forearm in a slow movement across the floor. Gradually this develops into a twisting and rolling movement than incorporates Cunningham's whole body in a moving sequence that she repeats as she moves from place to place

Cunningham was beginning to reflect on what she might share with other dancers, non-disabled and disabled, as well as what is unique to her own physicality. She also highlights the ways in which discomfort as a direct product of studio practice may have a different potential meaning for a disabled dancer in training. Cunningham considers the role of pain and discomfort and surprise when other dancers equally experience discomfort following repetition of particular stretch or movement. She frames this as the need to learn to distinguish:

the 'right' kind of pain 'i.e. when something is sore simply because it is difficult as opposed to pain because it was the wrong thing for the body. Cunningham 2007.

This distinction is a necessary one for all dancers. In some working environments responses to such danger signals may themselves be shaped by a company habitus embodying values that place continuity of performance over the long-term effects of injury on the individual dancer.

Cunningham's collaborative explorations with professional dancers in Curtis' own company Jess Curtis/Gravity made her aware how all of the dancers were 'in fact reconciling their movement to the (perhaps more subtle) limitations of their bodies' (Cunningham 2007). She was engaged both in revisiting her own body and its potential for movement, and in developing a style of movement that would inform her choreographic work.

In *Mobile* for example, she evokes the six months of practice required to alter a habitual pattern of walking without looking down:

I have to try to keep my head up. And it's really hard. I spent all my life looking down looking down at the ground. I'm an expert in surfaces gravel slate tarmac mossy paths and the floors in the shopping centre.

- *Mobile*

Cunningham is describing a conscious dismantling of a habitual way of moving not just in the studio but also in the outside world. These are embodied ways of being and moving, holding and using the body within an environment not designed for physical diversity, ways that have previously been experienced as inevitable, natural, and sensible<sup>102</sup>.

Here Cunningham's history of movement and comportment is dictated as much by limits in design of both environment and crutches as her perceptions of the capacities of her body. When Cunningham talks of the 'terrifying' re-orientation of her posture she is not ignoring the realities of uneven surfaces. She is rather unpacking new ways of taking them into account and exposing the affective associations that have been incorporated along with her own habits of movement. It is also possible to see that this as a durational process to embed intellectual understanding so that it becomes firmly part of changed self-perceptions.

A year of intensive training and exploration brought measurable changes in Cunningham's physicality, a first ever gain in bone density and a three cm gain in height as a result of the strengthening of muscles that supported her spine. These were accompanied by major shifts in self-perception. In 2007 she notes:

I feel I am re-inventing myself and that is fun... I cannot say that I find beauty or grace in the way my body looks or the way I move. -  
Cunningham 2007

Cunningham can be seen to point the deeply inscribed nature of a disabled habitus not easily shifted by political or personal insight:

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<sup>102</sup> For personal account of the profound emotional impact of such physical re-orientation and how long it may take see Kuusisto1988 and Edwards and Imrie 2003:243

I am a disabled person who has grown up wanting to be “normal” idolising the aesthetics of perfection and beauty that Hollywood etc. churns out—which makes me feel at times like a traitor to the ranks with friends and colleagues who are very comfortable and proud of their identities as disabled people. However I am now creating a way of working that undeniably relates to being disabled and this is forcing me to think of how I relate to that part of my identity. Cunningham 2007

Four years later, a further shift is discernable when she states in an interview with a Glasgow newspaper:

My body works the way it works. I do not consider there is anything wrong with my body any more. It is just different. It works in a different way. That's it. Cunningham cited in Ellis 2011

By 2013, with much greater experience behind her, both as performer and choreographer, Cunningham describes herself in a public lecture as a successful artist who places the lived experience of her impairment as central to her work (WOW 2013). She goes further by adding firmly ‘I would now never want not to be disabled’ (WOW2013)

In 2010 Cunningham noted a distinct shift in her body's sensory and spatial awareness in relation to the crutches. She recalls ‘the cliché people use- that the crutches are an extension of your body- I used to resent that because I never really felt that’ (Cunningham cited in Garavelli 2010).

She adds:

But now I'm very much in the place where that feels true. I do have the sense that I feel right through to the end of them, and I have this

capacity to be a very big presence. Cunningham cited in Garavelli 2010<sup>103</sup>

By 2007 Cunningham's identity as performer was now expanding to include that of dancer. Looking back to her journey towards developing her practice as performer and dance artist it is useful to consider her period of association with Curtis. He fulfilled a role not only as mentor but also offered Cunningham opportunities for performance and exposure to forms and practices stemming from his own experiences in experimental dance in the bay area in California, Berlin and circus performance in France.

## 8.7 Becoming a Dance Artist; Performer

In 2005 Cunningham was engaged by Curtis as a member of Jess Curtis/Gravity, an experimental company he had established in 2000. Cunningham performed in two of Curtis' works *Under the Radar* (2006) and *Dances for Non /Fictional Bodies* (2010) (DNFB) that were toured in Berlin, the West Coast of the US and the UK. The company employed not only Cunningham, but also two other disabled artists, Kaz Langley and David Toole<sup>104</sup>. The performances engaged Cunningham's skills as a musician, actor and dancer as well as in acting and movement.

Curtis treated the company as an experimental laboratory and assembled an international cast of performers with long established experiences of experimental forms in performance genres including music, circus, physical theatre, dance and cabaret. It was a company laboratory that was central to Curtis' MFA thesis for the University of California (Curtis2010) and thus allowing for exposure of his findings and reflections within the academy.

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<sup>103</sup> It was this quality of embodiment that stayed with me after watching Touch /Don't Touch in 2007 when I noted at the time in my journal 'it is as if the crutches are part of her very bones and make me aware of this whole skeleton'.

<sup>104</sup> Members of the company remain part of a group of trusted artistic collaborators in the making of her own works from 2007-2012



*Under the Radar* (nearly two hours in length) is set in an abandoned nightclub in which the characters take shelter. The presence of a physically diverse group of performers recalls a history of a world of cabaret that, alongside the freak shows of the past, has always provided a stage for performance for disabled artists. It creates a world of the sleazy sharpness of the pre-war cabaret, a world of musicians: well dressed women whose dress and comments suggest an association with high-class prostitution. There are moments of tenderness as well as confrontation and the virtuosity of each performer is given a place.

Aspects of the work engage directly with questions of spectatorship in relation to disability and play with the potential responses of the audience to the disabled performers. In an opening sequence Langley wheels herself to a barmaid standing behind a tall bar counter. A process of attempted communication is played out as she requests a refuge in the nightclub. The barmaid assumes a fixed smile, moves to gaze awkwardly at Langley, struggling to adapt to Langley's style of speech (shaped by her cerebral palsy). Several minutes later she shows her dawning understanding by repeating Langley's words 'You want to sleep here' and there is an audible moment of relaxation from the live audience.

Later, two dancers comment on a performance by the two disabled artists with a sarcastic sequence of words that starts with 'here come the contemporary dance'. This shifts to their engagement in a trio in which all three perform using crutches. Cunningham's smooth, virtuosic and graceful performance employs a movement vocabulary she was developing for the making of her own two performance works *Evolution* and *Mobile*. Her ease of movement offers a strong contrast with the tentative and awkward movement of the other two dancers both hampered by shoes with high heels and their lack of experience in balancing on crutches.

Jörg Müller juggles with three crutches in a solo punctuated by the drum rolls and cymbal clashing of circus performance. He juggles, drops crutches and remedies his mistakes before a laughing and appreciative audience. Suddenly Cunningham appears, folds her arms and the audience are silenced while he

sheepishly stops his performance. The mood shifts when Müller drops to his knees and offers a formal apology in a gesture that turns the bundled crutches to a bouquet of flowers that Cunningham accepts and bears away.

In another scene Cunningham's recorded voice recalls memories of difficulties in learning to walk, but her movement contradicts the text as she moves with skilful use of her crutches across the stage and literally walks up the wall<sup>105</sup>.

*DNFB* is another long work with performances lasting between one and a half and two hours. It is a complex and often chaotic work with movement and performance scores created by each performance artist (including Curtis himself). Curtis experiments with form, assembling its constituent parts in different ordering and spaces for each performance.

As with *Under the Radar* the research period involved intensive periods of improvisation and exploration. At a company workshop at Dada Fest 2010 Cunningham, somewhat ruefully, notes the unconscious but deeply exposing nature of the process. At one point the cast of *DNFB* was let loose in the costume and props department of a University Theatre. Cunningham's apparently light hearted selection of outfits, a fire suit and boxer's kit began to take on a more profound symbolism as to their function as protective and defensive mechanisms in her of improvisation that could produce disturbing exposures of a personal nature.

It is not uncommon to select from such research elements to include in the final performance. Cunningham raised at the same workshop, however, the risk of a different kind of exposure and spectatorship when improvisation of different elements and chance encounters become part of the form of the public performance, that of apparent failure in public.

For Cunningham the lack of an entirely predictable form to which she could adapt her performance made it an exciting site for her creativity. At the same time it exposed her to potential failure, not simply as an individual artist but

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<sup>105</sup> A device Cunningham expands in her own work *Evolution*.

also as a representative of other disabled artists. Her comment that ‘as a disabled artist I set high standards’ has echoes of Brew’s statement being about a felt duty as a pioneer to prove his ability and not to let down other disabled artists that might follow him into the field. It is a reminder that performance of people with visible impairments is also haunted by the shadow of the freak show and spectacle as ways of exposing disabled people to a humiliating ableist gaze and Garland-Thomson baroque stare and as objects rather than persons of ability.

Thus far this chapter has considered Cunningham’s work and creative explorations as part of performance choreographed by others. *Sputnik* and *DNFB* both engaged her undoubted stage presence in an aesthetic of spectacle, the imaginary and the surreal that was central to the current concerns of her mentors and directors Robson and Curtis. It now turns to considering her choreographic practice.

## 8.8 Becoming a Dance Artist: Choreographer

Cunningham notes<sup>106</sup> her interest in the effectiveness of minimalism in a number of European companies whose work she viewed performing at Tramway in Glasgow during her period of entering into dance. For her this is performance work where ‘less meant more’ and small gestures and simple movements could be expressive and meaningful for an audience.

We can see in Cunningham’s developing choreographic work engagement with two contrasting aesthetics. In *The Mobile* and *Evolution* it is minimalism that prevails. In her two Unlimited commissions, 12 (2012) and *Ménage À Trois* (2012) she plays with the surreal and the spectacular recalling both Curtis’ work and Robson’s dramatic spectacle in *Sputnik*.

### 8.8.1 *Mobile*

*Mobile* is a thirty-five minute solo devised and performed by Cunningham. The audience enters a space where the floor of the stage is bestrewn with

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<sup>106</sup> In conversations conducted in 2011

crutches. From each of these silver-coloured metallic sticks a shaped cuff and single handle protrude. They are presented as objects to gaze upon to look at without cultural prohibitions about staring at the unusual.

As the performance begins, roving spotlights act like searchlights sweeping the stage, illuminating the crutches for a full minute. Cunningham's approach is heard before seen with a distinctive metallic clicking sound of the crutches. She enters, forearms supported by the cuffs of two crutches, hands pressed on their handles, and she brings two others with cuffs crossed under her chin. This second pair seem both to restrict her movement by their ends dragging on the floor but also to suggest an innovative use, a practical way to carry two slightly unwieldy objects while travelling supported by crutches.

As the performance develops Cunningham starts to move among and between the crutches that cover the floor. She delivers a lecture /demonstration that distinguishes separate elements of crutch construction and singular elements of individual crutches and her differing relationships and associations with them. As Cunningham travels among the crutches she experiments with crutch and crutch-related movement with a section that ends with the hoisting of a trapeze created from three crutches firmly linked into a triangular shape.

The various experiments are accompanied by a her spoken reflections, first live, then recorded, that highlight discoveries not only about her use of the crutches, but also of her desires and intentions. She talks of 'always trying to get off the ground' and wanting to climb taking her crutches with her.

In the next section her movements engage directly with the swinging crutch as she dangles, reclines and moves around the frame. She experiments with different holds, touching the component parts of the structure, cuffs, handles; central sticks trying out this new environment and potential relationships between body and crutch. Her legs fold and push against the frame, one knee hooks over a corner then she 'walks' her legs in the air. As the trapeze swings her feet make contact with the ground.

The trapeze and her position on it change as she shifts position or pulls on a

protruding handle and alters balance and suspension point of body and trapeze. The music becomes stronger and louder and she swings back in to the trapeze locating different ways to hang, recline or suspend from the trapeze. Her legs fold and push against the frame, one knee hooks over a corner then she 'walks' her legs in the air. As the trapeze swings her feet make contact with the ground. The trapeze and her position on it change as she shifts position or pulls on a protruding handle and alters balance and suspension point of body and trapeze. The music becomes stronger and louder and she swings back in to the trapeze locating different ways to hang, recline or suspend from the trapeze

Finally she returns to the floor and selects separate crutches from the collection on the floor to add to the structure of the trapeze transforming it into a moving sculpture, a mobile of different parts. The process of construction is accompanied by her brief account of her everyday and personal connections with each crutch she adds.

The mini narratives illustrate how each experience changes and shifts her own perceptions and the reminiscences begin to include her relationships with other people. Cunningham encapsulates her shifts in relation to her use of crutches as tools, as a move from 'apprentice to master'. As she selects crutches to build the structure she alternates by using floor and trapeze as a point of balance for body.

The last crutches selected to complete the mobile are linked symbolically to other relationships and possibilities in her life. Cunningham speaks of the calm insightfulness engendered in her after she makes contact with the owner of one pair of crutches. There is a brief reference to her sexuality when she notes how one tall crutch might help her 'climb up to kiss tall men'. She notes 'the black ones' whose magical 'totally silent' impact on the ground allows her to meet others without being preceded by the click of a crutch and all it might signify as a sign of difference and disability.

Gradually Cunningham suspends and interconnects these crutches and crutch parts to form a mobile whose individual elements move in complex

relation to each other within the final structure. One crutch end pushed through the moulded flattened cuff of another looks like an image of articulation of femur and hip or knee joint. Cunningham touches one crutch in the completed structure and the shifts in the movement of this crutch impact on the others, changing the movement and movement potential of the whole. The mobile finds a new and momentary point of stasis and equilibrium.

Finally, Cunningham picks up one crutch and walks away slowly, crutch cuff cradled around her right arm, hand on its handle and feet placed carefully one in front of the other. As she disappears into the darkness upstage the music is quiet but allows the click of the crutch on the floor to be heard and the lights become spotlight then fade on the gently moving mobile. The mobile that remains offers a powerful moving symbol for the re-integration and cross connections of elements and movements within Cunningham's own body.

Throughout the whole work Cunningham extends and diminishes her presence by the different use of crutch-supported balance and movement. She soars above the stage using crutches of differing lengths, often extending the basic frame of her body with several crutches at once, until she momentarily appears like a giant creature of steel and bone and flesh.

Cunningham sculpts a body of elongated limbs, like the starveling emaciated bodies of a Giacometti sculpture then returns earth bound as a small, slow moving self-contained androgynous figure. Her body, extended by crutches, appears as alienated and distanced from the viewer as the Giacometti's *walking man* in Figure 8 below.

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Figure 8 Man Walking 1960 Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966)

These moments of distance from the viewer alternate with an invitation to hear small intimate stories of her body in relation to her crutches or to witness playful moments when she balances on a single crutch like a pogo stick or balances them on her head like a giant pair of antlers.

In her on stage persona Cunningham is magician, prankster, and storyteller conjuring fabulous images and shapes giving a glimpse of a world where steel

and flesh combine. She returns to tell stories of the everyday like that of the expensively tailored crutches that then do not fit or the country of origin of another pair of crutches.

As Cunningham says of her crutches in the final minutes of *Mobile*:

I can do anything with them. They are my doorstep, my chair my coat hook, my remote control, my partner. [pause] My work.

The crutches are stripped to their component parts then reassembled, put to use not just to aid her movement but as aesthetic objects in their own right. They are revealed as beautiful in the lights that play on the installation of crutches spread across the stage for the opening moments. They provide the basic material for the mobile spiralling above the stage at the end and the metallic tapping of crutches offers both live sound scape and a sound element picked up in the recorded musical score.

Biographical details are sparse but telling and at times hint of a disabled habitus. Cunningham, using the support of the suspended trapeze, speaks of the durational nature of a process where she learns to walk upright and to change a pattern of 'always looking at the ground' to ensure a safe placement of each crutch. In one story about a friend's crutches she talks not only of her willingness to receive the warm and embracing hug of the crutches' owner but also the rarity of her willingness to receive such intimacy of touch from another person.

*Mobile* combines both small details of everyday life and a diversity of examples and images of crutch and body in partnership that move the stories and images at times into the realm of the fabulous when steel and flesh combine like that in Robson's *Sputnik*. The title *Mobile* can be seen to refer both to aspects of Cunningham's own history of movement and training as aerialist and to her fascination with the moving sculpture forms in the work of the artist Alexander Calder (1898-1976).

Calder says of one of his mobiles, *The Universe* (1974):



each element can move, shift, or sway back and forth in a changing relation to each of the other elements in the universe. Thus they reveal not only isolated moments, but also physical laws and variation, among the events of life. Not extractions, but abstractions'. - Calder 1974 cited in Baal-Teshuva 1998: 49.

Here Cunningham constructs a mobile representing a dynamic and powerful sculpted image representative of variations and interplay of events and shifts in her fleshy body.

In her movement range we can see an extension of the balances and everyday use of her crutches identified by Curtis as well as the use of basic aerial skills in the trapeze work. She develops a rolling moving sequence spiralling movement through her body, adjusting balances and points of contact between foot hand and floor that pick up her earlier reference to the dancer's conception of movement that spirals through her body.

In *Evolution* we can see the development of an increasing use of autobiographical material, her abilities as a storyteller but also a direct engagement with the forms of dance. It is also possible to discern a refinement of movement with her crutches amounting to a more established movement vocabulary that can subsequently be observed *Ménage À Trois*.

*Evolution* and *Mobile*, often presented in a joint programme entitled *M.E.*, do not offer a spectacle but rather a series of small telling cameos in the form of stories that slowly unfold. The spoken text is often offered with a quiet and matter-of-fact tone. Cunningham's style of speaking, whether the words are pre recorded or spoken live to the audience, is deceptively simple and confiding. Both engage her capacity as a storyteller who uses words, movement and, objects in the service of the narrative. Both can be seen illustrative of an affirmative model of disability in the value and use placed on the particularities of her body and experiences in the world as a disabled person.

### 8.8.2 *Evolution*

*Evolution* is a more overtly autobiographical work, setting the stories about Cunningham's life in chronological order and engaging directly with dance forms. It consists of a seventeen-minute solo performed by Cunningham. The narrative moves through scenes associated with Cunningham's childhood, including participation in a ballet class, before ending with a final exuberant dance of celebration.

As the performance begins Cunningham is lying on her stomach, legs and arms outstretched. She remains motionless between spaces delineated two rectangular bars of light each containing a pair of metal-cuffed crutches. She is clothed in black tutu and short black ankle warmers, a costume that emphasises the naked flesh of arms, feet and legs exposed to view for a minute before she begins to move. The silence is broken by the sound of a single sustained cello note overlaid by her recorded voice telling of her own and her family's early experiences with doctors:

They told her to put me on my front. Now they say never to do that. It was because of the bar, because I could not roll over. If I choked I could not roll over [pause] because of the bar. Each leg fixed from foot to hip and the bar ran across the middle in a big letter A. [pause] I still sleep on my front. My mother says it was quite useful for changing my nappy. *Evolution*

The spoken memory is accompanied by a rolling of her body where arms are stretched apart and held in position by crutches. The movement builds first with a twist of her legs is added a counter twisting of arms similarly held in position by a single crutch. Using the contact points of crutch on flesh with powerful twisting of her pelvis she rolls turns and tumbles.

The two triangles of crutch and limbs remain fixed but are moved and paused to present a range of clear geometrical shapes. Cunningham's moves coincide with the unfolding text but contradict what is being said. The re-recorded accounts of restriction and limitation are directly contradicted through the powerful shifting, changing and extensions of her body in

movement.

She comes to rest on her back, legs stretched above her then rolls and turns again until she reaches an upright seated position legs akimbo and held in place by one crutch. Cunningham grasps the ends, pulling them behind her with noise and sudden movement that jerks her body into a stiff alignment of legs at 90 degrees to her body. The music fades and allows the gut-wrenching metallic click of the closing cuff to reverberate across the stage. A voiceover relates her experience of using calipers:

Even the leather was cold. Freezing cold leather kneecaps, first thing in the morning and the sound of the buckles [pause] freezing cold first thing in the morning against my legs.

Cunningham falls on her back jerking body and crutches into position alignment saying,

‘Calipers make you walk funny. And if you fell over that was it. You couldn’t get back up on your own’.

In a repeated sequence of movements Cunningham travels by placing one crutch tip in front of another like high heels tapping on the ground. Cunningham then pulls on the sticks of both crutches to drag her body, back resting on the floor, forwards towards another pair of crutches. At first she whistles a few bars of ‘singing in the rain’ then the music changes to Bach.

Cunningham reaches for the additional set of crutches and begins a series of ballet bar exercises first lying on the floor then uses arm crutches to bring her to a standing position. Her arms are held in a first position with her crutches gently extended to touch the ground at several feet either side of her body. Her feet are positioned one in front of the other with the second pair of crutches spread on the floor while still attached by their cuffs to her ankles.

The stage lighting changes to a warmer glow as the voiceover reports ‘and I remember my grandmother made me a little ballerina cardigan. It was perfect’

Her smile that accompanies these words has the quality of the grin of a small child focussed on, and delighted by, what they are doing. Cunningham initiates a series of barre exercises including *plies* and *ronds de jamps*. Her crutches alternatively fall into momentary fixed positions, follow her movements, and then are used as support for the movement of her body. Her expression moves from serious contemplation to wry or mischievous smile. Cunningham glances around at her invisible co –pupils, fidgets, and looks down for a moment with wonderment of a child discovering what her body might do.

At one level she appears to offer a parody of the everyday demanding and prescriptive training of the ballet dancer both as child beginner and adult professional. The crutches extend a line made by arm leg or torso. At other moments they become for Cunningham a series of different and awkward elements to be moved as if correcting and nudging the body to the positions in which arm or leg is extended into classical ballet poses.

The metal structures become a restricting frame that moulds and constricts Cunningham's body. The frame denotes a structured and structuring training pushing the dancer's body towards the shape and form of an ideal aspirational body that can never be fully realised in the flesh.

A voice over repeats 'and if you fell over that was it', a phrase that contrasts with her continuing and successful experiments in movement and recalls her comments on her work with Shannon. The section ends with Cunningham moving into and holding an extended and precarious back balance where she leans back on two crutches, balances an extended leg on the cuff of a third upright crutch while pushing her other foot onto the stick of a fourth held at an acute angle to the floor.

Suddenly she allows the image to fragment, both the crutches and her body drops as she moves the leg crutches into two parallel lines across the ground in front of her legs. Cunningham moves with the crutches clanking like metal flipper feet or skis as she guides them forward until she reaches the side of

the stage where she undresses. She removes the encumbrances of black tutu, ankle warmers and the crutches that encase her ankles.

What remains is a costume of black vest top and black shorts that exposes the flesh of her legs and arms, and two forearm crutches. The T-shirt and jeans Cunningham wears throughout *Mobile* make her appear an androgynous figure but here both the ballet tutu and the layer of clothes beneath reveal her female body.

Cunningham approaches the centre of the stage and speaks directly to the audience. The words contrast expectations based on medical assessments of her body's potential, and the changes in her body and perspective linked directly to her experiences in dance. She accompanies the speech with a variety of movements: *pliés*, sweeping of crutches behind her, and extending into poses balanced on two crutches. Cunningham recalls a medical check up before she started dancing:

You're as fit as you'll ever be. That's what they said. That was 2005 BD Before Dancin'. Now [pause] three jean sizes smaller [pause] five per cent increase in bone density. *Evolution*

Cunningham leans forward, using crutches to comfortable support arms splayed either side of her body and confides in the audience 'I don't really know who I am any more and I quite like that'. She sways gently on the crutches, the movement accompanied by the recorded sound of the to while humming the opening chords of Freed and Brown's '*Singing in the Rain*'.

As the music continues she swings, turns and covers the stage with a sense of pleasure and freedom that captures the mood of the original solo performed by screen dancer and choreographer Gene Kelly (1912-1996) to the same music. In the original film solo, Kelly expresses the joy of a man first realising his love for a woman and his liberation from a more rigid and constrained way of being in the world. For Cunningham there is a celebration of the pleasure of a liberation from much that has shaped and limited who and what she may become.

It is not a rigid translation of Kelly's original score, although some of her movement is a direct translation of Kelly's moves to suit Cunningham's own body. Kelly swings around a lamppost and Cunningham swings on and around her crutches. She suspends her body from the crutches, shifting bent legs from side to side in the same rhythm of Kelly's tap dance steps using side swings.

At other times it is her use of space and timing linked to the joyous score of the original music that connects her with Kelly. Like Kelly, she draws on a range of movement techniques with which she is familiar to express how she has been affected by significant personal important experiences that liberate her from former restrictions.

In Kelly's version his character's freedom is momentarily interrupted by the appearance of a uniformed policeman signifying a rigid and disapproving social order. Kelly hands over his umbrella to the policeman paying momentary obeisance to the established order, and then moves away with a jaunty posture that suggests a refusal to be confined.

In that last musical phrase, there is no policeman to interrupt Cunningham in full flight as there was for Kelly. At this point she pauses and it is as if, for a moment, she remembers prohibitions and imposed restrictions linked to her visible impairment and place in the world. Cunningham's movement slows down. She makes her quiet retreat but with backward and mischievous glances at the audience mouthing the final chorus of 'I'm singing and dancing in the rain'.

If we approach this work through the lens of disability art then we can see vivid representations both of well meaning but disabling attitudes contradicted by Cunningham's ability to move with and through the restrictions she places on her body. The symbolism of crutches whose use is imposed by others on their user is apparent in the obstacles they create in her attempt to engage in the ballet class. They become in turn, however, a potent symbol for restriction in the form of rigid techniques and attempts to shape a body according to an

impossible to realise image of the perfect body. They are also, however, aids in a positive sense to exploration of new and expressive movement.

If we remain with the tools available through methods of dance analysis we can consider, as with any artist, how others view the work, the artist's intention and the forms of dance with which she engages. Consideration of the artist's history and influences can add depth to analysis of their work. We can draw on the works of other choreographers as comparators when considering her particular use of autobiographical material within the work.

When we come to discuss Cunningham's movement vocabulary and how that is employed we are faced with an interesting dilemma how are we to think of these. Both with Cunningham and with Brew we lack examples of how to approach techniques based on their use of crutches or wheelchairs when our existing vocabularies remain based on a foot based model of dancing form. With Brew, for example, we can think of separating out movement phrases comparable to those identifiably based on a lexicon of ballet or Graham based techniques and we can of course consider elements of dynamics, shape, and form.

Cunningham's movement has been researched devised and refined for performance. What we can observe however, is that there are distinctive phrases and ways in which she dances moving in, on and around her crutches, they are not translations of other forms but are based on her own everyday abilities. Cunningham has not codified her movement but some distinctive elements are discernable through a close reading of her work.

Cunningham has a range of balances based on rotation of her wrists within the cuffs of one or two crutches. She employs different forms of side swings around and to the side of the crutches and moves jumps, lunges and throws her body between them in different ways. There are a variety of resting, setting, or lounging movements that play with points of balance, gravity, and achievement of moments of stasis. Cunningham variously uses single, double and multiple crutches at different angles coupled with a rise initiated by foot or hand contact with the crutch.

The examples below show images <sup>107</sup> where I have attached brief classificatory labels.

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Figure 9 Crouching Rest with wrist suspension Evolution

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<sup>107</sup> These are selected from images available publicly from the work and Cunningham's own website



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Figure 10 Side swing Evolution

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Figure 11 Seated rest high Two Crutches

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Figure 12 Single leg swing through two crutches

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Figure 13 Forward lean two crutches

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Figure 14 Back bend with four crutches

We can also witness characteristic ways in which she moves and is moved by her crutches. Cunningham both initiates a turn or fall of a crutch and the movement of the falling or turning crutch directs her body in another direction. In *Ménage À Trois* this interplay between flesh and metal is present the ways Cunningham moves in and out of contact with the body of the male dancer, moments when she and crutches move together, and her interactions with the puppet constructed from crutches. In this sense she adapts her vocabulary and movement to moving with another dancer.

### 8.8.3 *Ménage À Trois*

*Ménage À Trois* is a sixty-minute work devised and directed by Cunningham and the choreographer and video artist Gail Sneddon. Cunningham performed with dancer Christopher Owen. *Ménage À Trois* engages, through the unfolding of a fable with constructions of femininity and masculinity, and the impact of social constructions of both gender and disability, ideal form and less than ideal human reality upon intimate relationships.

The screens and video images used throughout the work convey a world of imagination, of images within the mind of the central character. The work begins with white laser projections, lines of light like an army of crutches, tumbling letters and spots of light. In the early scenes, Cunningham is alone

with her crutches. A sense of both desire and sensuousness emerges often in small movements by Cunningham. Her arm slips through a crutch cuff. A metal stick rolls along her flesh suggesting a quality of sensory experience as flesh meets the touch of metal.

A series of romantic scenes are projected on the screen. Cunningham shoots each of them down in an elaborate video game. As she forms the crutches to a man of her imagination the recorded text drifts across the screen. A long list of ideal attributes in a partner, offer a sardonically humorous list of exclusions as to what he will look like, will do or wear. The humour is suddenly interrupted by the last criterion that he 'will not be disabled'. In this litany there is no place for disability in the proportions and attributes of an ideal partner and it further hints at doubts about whether her own body may be desirable.

Cunningham develops a duet with her crutch lover. Slowly Owen, a tall figure, emerges as puppet master for the puppet and eventually partner to Cunningham. Despite his size there is a delicacy and sensitivity to his movement in relation to his partner. The duet builds as the two bodies begin to yield to the each other. Cunningham, balances on Owen's shoulder allowing herself to lean into his weight. Her movement of balance and support on crutches turns into a more dynamic duet in which both bodies support each other and initiate movement.

Cunningham disappears off stage than emerges dressed in an operatic gown but corseted by the defensive spikey metal cage of crutches.. As she is moved slowly into view Cunningham's singing voice captures the longing and sensuality of Susannah's aria from act 4 of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* 1786. The words talk of desire and longing '*Deh vieni, non tardar, o gioja bella*' (Oh, come, don't be late, my beautiful joy) '*Vieni ove amore per goder t'appella*' (Come where love calls you to enjoyment)<sup>108</sup>. Susannah is a woman with a

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<sup>108</sup> A full English translation of the aria by Naomi Gurt Lind is available from [www.aria-database.com/search.php?individualAria=220](http://www.aria-database.com/search.php?individualAria=220)

sense of self, her desires and wishes, with a sense of agency and how to go about exercising it.

At this point in *Ménage À Trois* Cunningham sings of a joy to come and invites Owen's embrace but the cage of metal repels any possible intimacy. Cunningham allows Owen to remove cage and the orange outer gown for a time leaving her dressed in the shift beneath and then joins with him as they move for a time into a sensuous duet.

This is followed by a brief scene of domestic intimacy as the couple sit at an elevated table sitting in a companionable silence at the breakfast table, reading newspapers and relaxing in each other's company. By the end of *Ménage À Trois* first the imagined lover of the flesh, Owen, then that of metal puppet man disappear leaving Cunningham alone.

The trio of elements in the title refers to the man and the woman and the crutches. Cunningham plays at many levels with the meeting of flesh and metal for example in her dances with the puppet man and the real man and the metal cage around her fleshy body. Her opening voiceover speaks not just to intimacy of the flesh but phenomenological experience of the body:

Sometimes I feel like a machine. I forget I was made to touch skin, to feel heat, breath, to have someone's smile pressed against my neck. I wasn't made to click... But with you I click. We. Click. Like a clique, a trio.

The 'you' in the text refers to a pair of crutches. Cunningham uses crutches as props. One becomes a machine gun to shoot down images of romantic settings and couples that are projected onto gauze screens on the set. Draped in a jacket, two become the body of crutch man with whom Cunningham dances before they introduce the body of a flesh and blood man, danced by Christopher Owen.

The crutch becomes a signifier of disability in the sense of imaginings that restrict and disguise the real flesh and blood person. They are also employed

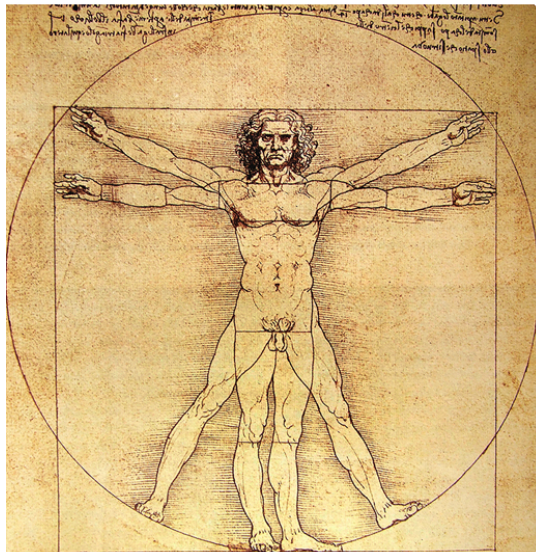
as signifiers of unyielding social constructions ideals of masculinity and femininity that constrict and limit the potential for intimacy between the couple.

The crutch bodice for example is used as part of the changing wardrobe of Cunningham's stage persona. She starts in a simple shift small shift that reveals her body. To this costume are added symbols of a romantic femininity, first a wide floating tulle petticoat then a grand orange gown. The orange dress, encased in its restricting crutch corset evokes the archetypical Cinderella story of an isolated female figure rescued and brought into an ideal position as beautiful, but powerless queen, rescued by a princely figure.

Placed alongside the character of Susannah, dress and crutch bodice can also be read as symbolising both cultural restrictions and the agency of a woman. This is a woman who makes creative use of the strategies available to her within the limits of her society to shift her position. She becomes the one who seeks and engages with a lover rather than simply waiting for one to magically appear. At the end of the dance Cunningham's character steps out of all these trappings of femininity and stands, still woman, and with her crutches but less entrapped by the constructions of femininity the costumes represent.

There is no simple fairy tale ending in which one woman's identity is subsumed within the image of a royal coupling of man and woman. Cunningham's character emerges from a lonely adolescent dream of intimacy and the questions remain both about what kind of woman she can become and what kind of relationships she can build both within warring parts of psyche and with others.

A central theme in the work is that of the ideal, the ideal relationship and partner, in particular a notion of an aesthetic ideal that is encapsulated in an image incorporated in publicity material for the work reproduced in Figure16 below. This figure created with crutches draws on the well-known portrayal of bodily ideal by the Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) shown in figure in figure15.



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Figure 15 (right) Publicity Material for *Ménage à Trois*

Figure 16 (left) Vitruvian man: da Vinci c.1490

The image of the body of crutches introduces a series of linked symbols, of the crutch as signifier of difference, of crutches as the bony skeleton and of an alternative aesthetic where other bodily elements and combinations offer other images of physical beauty. Unlike da Vinci's drawing there is nothing within the image itself that indicates whether the body represented is male or female.

Cunningham's references and use of other forms, to Da Vinci, to Calder's mobile, to Mozart's aria, and references to ballet and to film dance, can also be seen as having a strategic function in consolidating her position of artist in the field of dance with knowledge and concerns linking directly to an existing artistic canon. In a similar fashion, Bowditch's engagement with forms of performance art, Brew's engagement with dance forms can be seen at one level to add to their positioning as artists with links to a pre-existing canon.

In her Bourdieusian analysis of the post-war creative practice of the modernist dance artist and choreographer, Martha Graham (1894-1991) dance critic and historical sociologist Gay Morris (2001) considers how an artist as social agent seeks strategies to maintain or to change their position within a particular artistic field that of dance. These strategies and the work made by the artist are for Morris 'based on the what is possible at the moment and

what is in the artist's interest' (2001:54). These depend not only on knowledge of the present but also draw on what Bourdieu describes as:

the space of possibilities inherited from previous struggles, which tend to define the space of possible position-takings and thus orient the search for solutions, and as a result, the evolution of production (Bourdieu 1993:183)

## 8.9 The Space of Possibilities

For Cunningham, the 'space of possibilities inherited from previous struggles' has been shown to include resultant historical shifts in both social and performance fields, in relation to disability and the repositioning of disabled people in a wider range of fields. In the field of professional dance, the entry of new forms and structures in CI and post modern dance have created spaces for performances that incorporate a variety of performance modalities, theatre, circus, dance and music and sculpture, space for 'possible position-takings' with which Cunningham has engaged.

In her experiments in developing her everyday movement and day-to-day experiences for performance, Cunningham was involved in explorations that link her to the dance field and canon. Her use of quotidian movement and mixing of artistic forms have similarities with the early works of post-modernist choreographers such as Simone Forti and Trisha Brown.<sup>109</sup>

Cunningham, like Brew and Bowditch, was able to take advantage of opportunities made available during a period of relative prosperity in the UK. The UK was investing money in public funding of the arts that supported her training and dance in general. Blue Eyed Soul was still publicly supported, the generous grant from Arts Council Scotland, and the well funded *Unlimited* commissions all offered opportunities that she was ready to take up.

Her education through to University level, as well as the support and expectations of her family, afforded space and possibilities for her to remain in mainstream education. As with Bowditch, her first encounters with dance, in

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<sup>109</sup> For further discussion of the work of these choreographers see, for example, Baner (1993) and Burt (2006).



Cunningham's case her ballet class, were less successful. With both artists advances in the knowledge of teachers in how to offer a dance curriculum and teaching practice offering universal access had clearly not be available to the first dance instructors they encountered.

Struggles that resulted in the emergence of a new field, that of Disability Arts, had a critical part to play in Cunningham's immediate post-university training. As has been argued in this chapter, Cunningham was able to build social and cultural capital that would remain important resources for her further development. We can see the importance of contact with other disabled people at the point of entering work emphasised in the Shah and Priestley 2011 study discussed in 5.3. For Cunningham, as for Amy in the Shah and Priestley example, the field of Disability Arts has offered a valuable starting place but not an end in itself.

Cunningham can be seen to have achieved and to maintain position as an artist both in Disability Arts and what (in 5.8,) I have designated a Dance and Disability sector established as a subfield of mainstream dance. The respected positions Cunningham has achieved in both fields is illustrated by the use of photographs of Cunningham dancing as central images in publicity material for Dada Fest Festivals in 2008 and 2013 and for *Unlimited* 2012.

Her artistic choices can also be seen as strategic choices offering a possibility of participation as an artist and positioning herself in both fields. Cunningham, as with Bowditch and Brew, has taken the decision to perform her body rather than disguise the nature of her out- of-the- ordinary physicality like the artist Mary Archbold discussed in 3.8.

For Cunningham this has engaged an overt link to the experiences that have shaped that body as a disabled body and speak to the concerns of Disability Arts. A disabled reviewer for Disability Arts Online, Nina Mühlemann, writes of the impact of Cunningham's honesty on her first viewing of *Ménage À Trois*:

The first time I saw Claire Cunningham's dance performance piece *Ménage à Trois* during the Unlimited festival, I found it hard to digest. It addressed feelings of loneliness, internalized oppression and ableist

presumptions in a brutally honest way. I felt sad and ashamed because I could relate to those feelings. Mühlemann 2012

Cunningham's work has been performed in venues and festival directly associated with Disability Arts Including Dada Fest. It has also been shown in festivals and theatres within a more mainstream field. It is therefore made available to viewers with very different experiences of living in the world as disabled or non-disabled people.

At an individual level we can see that Cunningham's ability to take up opportunities available to her is also dynamically related to her re-evaluation of her body and its potential strengths, and the shaping of her own positive identity as a disabled artist. She not only unpacks elements of a disabled habitus but also comes to discover what is valuable, and original, in her virtuosic use of her crutches.

It is not just that she sees herself as valuable, or that she comes to identify with a wider community of disabled people, as Cameron notes in his affirmative model. Cunningham comes to use her experiences and capabilities as a disabled artist as valuable resources for her art. It is this lived experience of disability to which Cunningham refers to in her WOW2013 presentation that makes her work distinctive.

This chapter has approached her work, by drawing on her own articulation of her interests as an artist, her biography, training, reflection on the place of artistic collaborators, and influences together with consideration of selected works. This has allowed consideration of how all these aspects, including her particular use of autobiographical material in her choreography, intersect in the work she created between 2007 and 2012.

The chapter has teased out various elements in the development of her work but argued that these, in the end, these need to be seen as separate parts that co-exist within an organic whole, the colloidal system referred to at the beginning of this chapter. As an artist we can see Cunningham's continuing fascination with crutches, their history and that of her body and its potentiality. When considering her work we can see her interest in story telling and the

use of selected autobiographical material together blending of skills and knowledge of artistic and performance forms.

The approach in the case study can equally apply to understanding the work and development of any artist. What fascinates them, what influences can be detected from training opportunities and indeed how did these become available and how were they able to make full use of those opportunities? A fascination with crutches might be equated for example, to a ballet dancer's fascination with the potential in their feet or the Khatak dancer's explorations of the expressive possibilities in articulation of their hands.

Cunningham's work offers a particular potent example of Cameron's affirmative model of disability<sup>110</sup>. The model speaks both to her development of a disabled identity and to her development as an artist who makes creative use of her body and crutches. To discuss her work without discussion of her impairment and the use she makes of her body would be to do it a disservice.

To discuss her work only around what she addresses about a disabling world would be to ignore other aspects of the work and do a disservice to her artistry. When she creates the crutch bodice in *Ménage À Trois* Cunningham engages not just with how psychic defences and the associated affects are necessarily created in order to operate in a disabling world, Cunningham is present in a moving dancing body that is at the same time marked as female and with distinctive features linked to her impairment. She gives poetic shape to a process of internalisation of other ideals of social constructions such as masculinity or femininity that shape and damage potential interactions with others.

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<sup>110</sup> See discussion of Cameron's model in 3.9.

## 9 Conclusion

This thesis considers separate elements: disability; impairment; dance, and artistry and commenced by posing several questions. What is disability? What is disability in relation to dance? What supports the entry of a disabled dance artist into the field of professional dance in the twenty first century? How should we approach a critical analysis of the works they create?

The extended case studies of the three artists have taken a multi-layered approach to contribute to our further and deeper understanding both of the context in which they have developed their artistic practices and their artistic creations. The studies reveal no clearly uniform journey and point to the need for further academic studies of other emergent disabled artists to build a valuable resource for further developments within the dance field and for would-be entrants to the profession, both disabled and non-disabled.

The subjects of the case studies, Bowditch, Brew, and Cunningham, are individuals with distinctively different pathways into the dance sector who have developed artistic practices producing work of great originality. There is considerable variation both in the work they make and in the ways in which their experiences in the wider world and within the field of dance colour or shade what can be observed in their work.

Their works add to a growing canon of dance works by disabled artists. The three selected dance artists can be seen as exemplars, aspirational models for future disabled and non-disabled entrants to the profession. Close analysis of their individual professional and personal trajectories also speak to the complexity of the links between opportunity and the development of a choreographic practice that offer important resources to be examined by all dance artists who seek to make work with an originality and quality that engages directly with the experiences of their audiences.

Chapter two considers the meaning of the terms disability and impairment and the material consequences of living in the world as a disabled person. In tracing a pathway through a range of existing scholarly work on the subject it

exposes the importance both of the part disabled people themselves can, and have, played in confronting and changing societal, political and attitudinal barriers to full participation in all aspects of public, social and private spaces. The artists and ideas examined in the chapter also point to a need to move beyond well-intended structures and legislation to attending to how these are actually put into practice.

Impairments, for some, may have impacts that require additional resources and considerations to support their ability to live lives as full citizens. Crow's work as both artist and dancer demonstrates the need for continuing vigilance and attention to these factors. These include structures with financial implications such as a benefit system that needs to continue to meet the additional costs of transport needs, sign interpreters and assistive technologies and personal assistance in order to enable disabled people to participate as fully as possible in work and daily life.

The findings also draw our attention to the fact that dance artists are also workers and that, as with Allen, the attitudes and approaches of fellow workers, and those holding positions of power and influence within that world are also an important factor for building successful and sustainable careers. Changes in structures and in alliances made between different organisations within performing arts and within dance can ensure a commissioning programme, such as *Unlimited*, to support the development of work by disabled artists.

A number of the specialist mentoring programmes used by the three artists, offer models for future developments as do the posts created by SDT. Whether or not these will be continued will depend on a willingness to learn from them. A sustainable and effective programme will be dependant on protecting sources of funding as well the willingness of mainstream companies and organisations to continue in partnership with disabled artists.

Chapter three explores an imaginative space, the cultural representations of disability together with the symbolism and psychic function of these imaginings of particular relevance to dance as an art form. It makes a link

between scholarly explorations of image and perception and the ways these become imbedded in the individual psyche.

Bringing together the works of Goffman, Bourdieu and Cameron allows for a way of thinking that can address both structures and individual agency. Taken together they can account for why, and how, particular attitudes around disability are played out in unequal encounters between disabled and non-disabled people where conscious and unconscious are at play. Their ideas also allow room to focus upon both the creativity and resourcefulness of people with impairments in developing individual and effective strategies to employ in a struggle for respected positions within a disabling world. We can see how, in varying degrees, the exposure and dismantling of habitual patterns of response have played a role in the development of all three artists.

Chapter four considers what happens in the arts when representations of disability or impairment are challenged by the actual presence of deaf and disabled artists and performers. That is, where they successfully take up positions as the producer and not the object or subject matter of images and artwork.

The study of the rise of the emergent field of Disability Arts shows that, as within any field, the actors within it engage in struggles and find positions of greater or lesser power in defining both what is the nature of a work within disability arts. This power extends to questions of how artists and their creative work are to be evaluated, on what basis – political or artistic – and who is to decide what is work meriting attention and inclusion in a canon of Disability Arts. The controversies around innovation, form and the intention of and themes of the work created are shown to have similarities to those present in the emergent field of political dance in 1930s.

If, as Bourdieu and Burt suggest, aesthetic evaluation is not value-free this does not exclude the consideration of artistic merit. The apparent splits between Disability Arts and the subfield of dance and disability as well as the wider dance field both emerge from concerns about how effectively a dance work contributes to wider explorations and understanding of the breadth and

depth of human experience and what factors contribute to or detract from its aesthetic worth.

What becomes apparent is the need for a more robust critical framework within both Disability Arts and wider fields. In order to refine and to develop their artistic practices, emergent artists require not only nurturing but also exposure to the kind of critical appraisal that challenges them to develop their artistic judgment and capacity for self-reflection. We can see in the case studies how all three artists have responded to opportunities to engage with mentors, colleagues and collaborators who have enabled them to develop critical awareness of their practice.

Chapter five looks more directly at the issues raised in the chapters two to four within the context of the UK dance sector in the twenty-first century. It exposes the dance sector as a site of considerable competition for resources, employment and for what is deemed cultural capital. Patterns of employment in the industry create demands for entrepreneurial and management skills. To pursue and to maintain a working career within the field necessitates not only the acquisition of performance skills but the development and management of a portfolio of work as administrator, teacher or workshop leader (5.1).

It is clear that access to the profession requires changes in how all forms of dance are taught and the importance of embracing methods of teaching accessible to students of all physical and sensory and cognitive abilities. What the experiences of the three artists show is that however useful particular forms like CI may be, what is more important is the development of accessible methods of pedagogy that allow students to train in the forms that most attract their interest.

The general education debates raised in chapter five point to a need for vigilance when considering the relative merits of a specialist or integrated training for disabled students. The use of dance support workers for studio practice can both enable the student's learning and potentially isolate students from sources of collaborative learning with their peers. Career development opportunities within specialist companies, particularly within

Disabled Arts, can perform an important function in an artist's development. But, as Cunningham's experience demonstrates, they may also limit possibilities for further development.

Together with the further studies that needed to be made of other disabled dance artists, these extended case studies provide important insights that could shape new approaches to professional dance training. If we are to take the artistic contribution of disabled artists seriously, both in the academy and in training future generations of dance artists, we need sufficient studies and documentation to allow selection of material for incorporation into all aspects of the curriculum, not just specialist modules of dance and disability.

## **9.1 Disability/Impairment**

Chapters two and three have exposed different usages and meanings associated with the terms 'disability' and 'disabled' that have shifted over time with various consequences. We can conflate the terms disability and impairment, whether physical, sensory or cognitive, for the purposes of interpreting the statistical data provided both in chapter 2 and 5.2. This data provides clear evidence that to be disabled has consequences that severely limit people's life chances, both educationally and in employment. This has obvious implications for attempts to remedy inequalities in access to dance training, as discussed in 5.4.

If we stay with the conflation of disability and impairment that Barnes and Oliver identified in what they term a 'medical model' as discussed in 2.2, we can see how disability becomes an imposed category with particular consequences. Brew (7.20) and Cunningham (8.1) report very different experiences of medical interventions and their impact on bodily functioning associated with their specific impairments. For Brew, these interventions are helpful; for Cunningham, impaired in different ways and in different circumstances, the process engages a clinical gaze that contributes to a sense of alienation from her body.



With the 'medical model' (2.2) Barnes and Oliver refer to a process of classification that includes conceptions of loss, fragility and diminished functioning. It is a process of objectification turning the individual into a figure of a heroic, tragic, pitiable and less than whole human being who becomes the object of an intrusive curious act of looking like the contradictory cultural stereotypes of hero and scrounger co-present in the UK media in 2012.

We can also separate out the two categories, impairment and disability, to employ a 'social model of disability' as distinct from a 'medical model of disability' as discussed in 2.2. Then it is possible to begin to address the social factors that disable artists entering the field of dance and the barriers that reproduce these inequalities. We can examine particularities of impairments and their effects on an individual. This includes both the abilities and potentialities associated with them, as discussed in the work of Allen (2.4). In Bowditch's *Proband* we can see that the nature or cause of impairment can become a theme for creative explorations of the shape and nature of the human body.

The persistent presence of the disabled figure as a cultural trope draws on this association of disability with tragedy and pity (3.1 and 3.2). As has emerged clearly in these discussions the term 'disabled' as a category of identity has different meanings or consequences depending on whether it is ascribed or imposed by others or assumed by the individual. Cameron's affirmative model of disability and disabled identity (3.9) speaks to the ways in which this may not be only an individual matter. Cameron's model allows for a process of positive identification with others who lay claim to an identity as disabled person.

As demonstrated in chapter four, individual disabled artists in their engagement with a range of cultural forms including those of performance, have the capacity to offer counter-narratives of impairment and disability. This may be a central theme, as in the work of the many artists who work within the new field of disability arts (4.1) and dance (Cunningham's M.E. discussed in 8.8). More subtle challenges are offered by the way all three artists in the case studies use the expressive possibilities within the range of movement

capabilities in their bodies. It is also present in the different ways wheelchairs and crutches are drawn upon in their performance work; body and wheelchair are not simply symbols of restriction but tools with the potential to convey power and subtlety of emotion.

The accounts of the three artists illustrate different ways of engaging with a disabled identity. With Cunningham (8.1), for example, we can see a durational process that moves from an intellectual acceptance to full acceptance of a disabled identity and runs alongside her gradual assumption of an identity as dance artist. Brew goes through a period of disruption in his professional career as a dancer to taking up a new and strong identity as both disabled person and dancer. With Bowditch that identity appears earlier but with all three their histories reveal the importance of other disabled people in forming that identity.

With Davis' attention to what he terms normalcy discussed in 3.1, we can consider the construction of a category of disability, or non-normate, and its relation to another constructed category, that of normal or normate, against which people and bodies are to be ranked. Davis, by drawing attention to the so called normative body as socially constructed, opens up consideration of how conceptions of the norm function to deny and disguise the reality of human variation across populations and an individual lifespan. It also alerts us to considerations not only of what is constructed as a normative dancing body but also how much this deviates from what is constructed as normal outside the world of dance.

It is easy to forget that by placing their work in performance spaces outside those of disability arts, disabled artists take certain risks. Reception of the work of a disabled artist is ultimately beyond their control.<sup>111</sup> Artists may employ different strategies. Archbold (3.8) chooses to disguise the presence of her prosthetic arm. By refusing to disguise the aspects of their atypical dancing bodies all three artists, Bowditch, Brew and Cunningham, can be said

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<sup>111</sup> As I left Dundee Rep after a performance of *M.E* rehearsing in 2012, I was temporarily stunned by overhearing the sexist and disparaging comments made about Cunningham's body and presence on the stage by a group of drunken youths who had attended the performance

to perform their bodies as they are and by doing so take certain risks. Kupperts talks about these risks by observing

Disabled dancers confuse non-disabled people's concepts of what dance can be, what bodies are supposed to do, and what disability means. As a consequence, critics like Arlene Croce lose their safe grounding and get angry. The ambiguous decision to perform one's body, to enact a drama of activity and passivity within one's physicality, opens up new chapters for disability narratives - and for body art, dance and performance. - Kupperts 2001:39

Davis allows our attention to turn to variations in bodily capabilities rather than questions of impairment and incapacities. His approach also allows us to think of the use to which such variations may be put as a source of the expressive movement central to dance as an art form. In other words, how these are seen as valuable assets and tools for an artist's work within Cameron's affirmative model of disability.

Cunningham's account (8.6) of discovering the capabilities of her body through her dance training with Lloyd-Jones suggests a first and necessary step not just for a disabled artist but one of importance for all dancers in training. With Bowditch we can see, by contrast, the disabling barrier that prevented her from entering into dance classes at college. Here it is the lack of imagination on the part of the instructor linked with his or her lack of knowledge of other dance forms that creates the seemingly impossible barrier. It is a barrier that also excluded Bowditch from discovering her body's capacities for movement. For Bowditch (6.2) it was the particular dance form, CI, coupled with the dancing presence of both disabled and non-disabled dancers, that first opened up her consideration of what her body can rather than cannot do.

With Brew and his work with Lunn (7.3), we witness a process of discovery of the capabilities of his newly sculpted body and the capability of movement through his newly acquired wheelchair. He begins by measuring these capabilities against the norms of his previous training and dancing body. In

Brew's subsequent work at Candoco (7.4) we see an opportunity for him to explore these new capabilities in relation to the different dance forms and creative practices of the choreographers with whom he worked. It illustrates not only the place of dancing with other disabled dancers in Brew's process but also a fruitful engagement with familiar and previously unfamiliar dance forms.

There is a clear logic to some of the conscious choices each artist makes to further their individual careers. Bowditch, for example, thought through carefully both her own resources and her willingness to engage with the opportunity to perform 'with the big boys' (6.6.) in *Angels of Incidence*. In other words, she considered the capital she could draw upon before competing for a respected place within the field of dance. We can also see the more unconscious logic of practice discussed in 3.10.

Bowditch and Cunningham can both be seen to respond to a realistic need to protect their bodies from major injury in different ways. Bowditch restricted herself to certain ways of moving and developed a habitus where she is both bold in taking on new challenges and cautious about further exploration. This does not, however, prevent her from engagement in the Candoco workshop that allows her to rethink her body's capabilities.

Cunningham similarly developed a habitus, shaped by family values, where she would take on challenges. She operated in the world through a process that began with denial of the impact of impairment on her body and resolved the contradictory needs to care for it by a psychic process of alienation from her body and its capacities.

With Cunningham, we can also see how changing the meaning and context of bodily practices that aim to protective and develop bodily capacities can impact upon their perceived usefulness. Her early experiences with medical interventions, where she felt treated as a body of parts to be fixed, contributed to this alienation from her body. As she began to examine the nature of her disabled habitus, she was able to turn attention back to her body and its functioning by viewing both body and its capacity as valuable tools for her as

an artist. We can see part of this process in her early encounters with dancers but also in her enthusiastic engagement in her one-to-one body conditioning sessions where she was an active participant in discovering and refining practices to support her body and could re-engage with curiosity about its functioning.

Bourdieu's concept of a logic of practice shaped by encounters in particular fields, and operating below the limen of consciousness, can account both for Cunningham's powerful affective response to being described as a dancer and her denial that what she was doing could be regarded as dance. What were internalised were attitudes around what constitutes a dancing body and indeed what constitutes dance. She was able to consider and engage with aerial training because it does not have these other associations with restriction and barriers despite the fact that, like dance, it would make powerful demands on her physical strength.

The experiences of all three artists show also how Bourdieu's concept of habitus needs to allow for the possibility of identifying what elements of an established habitus may have value on entering a new field. For Bowditch and Cunningham there are strong and helpful elements in their originally constructed habitus. Brew takes with him elements of a cleft habitus, and different training and company habitus in the different companies and fields within which he works as an artist.

## **9.2 Dance**

This thesis has approached the UK theatre dance sector during the years 2007-2012 as a field of endeavour in which three disabled dance artists have sought to participate and to locate both themselves as artists and their creative work.

The case studies reveal how each artist has benefitted from a selection of what I have deemed affirmative action programmes initiated within the sector. Brew's participation in FCD's co-mentoring programme and his choreographic fellowship at SDT (7.6) and Bowditch's engagement with East London

Dance's *Cultural Shift* (6.6.) offered valuable opportunities both to develop their skills and to address any lacunae in their development to date.

These programmes addressed precisely the need for continuing support and development in the careers of all dancers identified Burns and Harrison's 2009 report (5.1). They were, however, like Cunningham's Creative Scotland Grant (8.5), dependent on the availability of relatively generous funding for the arts during this period.<sup>112</sup>

From 2003 onwards, starting from Verrent's survey of training establishments, we can see the dance sector begin to address the question of disabling barriers to the recruitment and training of young disabled entrants to the profession (5.4). We can also see how these initiatives were fuelled directly by the legal duties and obligations outlined in the anti-discriminatory legislation contained within the DDAs.

As Bowditch's experience demonstrates there is a clear difference between questions of access and what is accessible to her within dance in Australia and in the UK. With Bowditch a question of access was dealt with by her technical presence in the college classroom albeit tucked in a corner. The form, content and experience present in the workshop organised by Candoco made it accessible to her and indeed made it imaginable she might dance.

It is not just a question of finding the body's capacities for movement or space to explore these possibilities. Cunningham was, for example, able to imagine engaging with training in basic aerial skills for performance. Dance, and the idea of her engagement with dance, remained unimaginable to Cunningham. So unimaginable to her as a disabled artist that Cunningham could audition for work in an inclusive dance company but still claim with considerable vehemence that what she had to offer was not dance and that she is not a dancer (8.5). This aversion, experienced as a personal disposition, was one clearly shaped by her disabled habitus.

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<sup>112</sup> The impact of cuts funding has a particular relevance for Cunningham. Blue Eyed Soul, the inclusive dance company, who provided her first professional engagement as dancer and aerialist disbanded in 2012 as a direct result of their loss of central arts funding in 2011.

Curtis (8.5) the person who convinced her otherwise, offered her a viewpoint of what dance is or might be, a dance with which she might engage. He, and later Cunningham, spoke of her style and skill in the use of her crutches as a virtuosity to be identified and valued. It is a virtuosity to take into dance and by implication to add to and shift the nature of the form and its engagement with virtuosity.

Where Cunningham is encouraged to identify and to exploit virtuosity the disabled choreographer Hoghe (4.4) looks to diminish it both within himself and his co-performers. For Hoghe the challenge is to pare movement down to the minimum whether his own within its potentially more limited range or that of the trained (and non-disabled dancers) who join him in performance. As a creative artist Hoghe seeks a position where 'very little movement can have a big effect' and he can 'share the quality of the dancers and the music with the audience' (Hoghe cited in Marranca 2010:1).

In effect we have two performing artists, both with visibly impaired bodies, two sets of particular capabilities and two very different ways of working with those capabilities. What I term their artistry lies not just in identifying those capabilities but also in the selection and crafting of the possibilities in performance. As artists who have successfully positioned themselves within fields of experimental dance they can also be seen to responding to making strategic choices in their interests as artists that are themselves shaped by the possibilities that open up in a field where different conceptions of dance are emerging.

### **9.3 Artistry**

Throughout the thesis the term artistry has been used to denote not only creative skill but also to denote a variety of associated ideas. It engages both artistic vision and artistic intention as well as themes addressed in performance. The term artistry also alludes to the crafting of the work and the resources with which an artist chooses to engage including vocabularies of movement, staging possibilities and choreographic devices, in other words

craftsmanship. Most of all I am implying an originality and flair in executing that craftsmanship.

I have argued that, as with disability and dance, the meaning of the concept of artistry and what is possible is intricately linked with the possibilities within wider fields. There is the artist's chosen field or arena of practice. There are also the wider pre-occupations and concerns of people existing in the cultural and social and historical period within which these artists are exercising their artistry. In each of the studies, I have identified work overtly concerned with impairment or disability, but that is by no means the only theme or preoccupation of the individual artists.

We can see in discussion of Cunningham's *Ménage À Trois* (8.8) an engagement with questions of alienation, loneliness and separation between people living within a rapidly shifting and globalized society. Bowditch's work with Girl Jonah engages with the location of women within society as does, more obliquely, *Leaving Limbo Landing* and its overt theme of migration.

There were also changes in the physical environment in which artists in 2012 could show their works, changes that impacted upon their audience. While there is still a considerable time lag, by 2012 theatres and venues were beginning to meet criteria for accessibility imposed by the DDAs. It was possible to sit in a theatre next to someone sitting in a wheelchair or another person listening discretely to an audio description. In opera, in particular, the text of the libretto is often screened in full view of the audience without finding this entirely unusual.

The shifts both in critical framework as well as the change in composition of the group of reviewers that now includes disabled as well as non-disabled critics (3.4) offers different ways of analysing the artistry of disabled artists. As I have argued the artistry of disabled artists in the twenty first century has also be situated within a wider history. By this I mean the shadow of a wider history of spectatorship and the appearance of disabled artists in public performance spaces particularly within that of the Freak show (4.1 and 4.2) as both artists,



to some extent exhibiting a craft, and people presented as objects of intrusive curiosity for a paying public.

The consideration of the place of artistry is crucial when considering how to engage with the very personal material that Cunningham draws upon in her performances as discussed in 8.9. It allows us to approach strands of the work engaging with the impact of impairment on an individual without turning this into a stereotypical representation that conflates the pitiable the tragic or the heroic with disability.

In Brew's *Remember When*, Cunningham's *M.E.* and Bowditch's *Proband* each artist draws on aspect of their personal histories and the history of his or her body and unvarnished presentations of restriction. The artists draws on these elements of personal experience as sources from which to select elements to be crafted in ways to challenge such facile representations of impairment or disability represented in the cultural representations and images discussed in chapter three.

I have argued further that contemporary work by disabled artists who engage directly with overtly political themes can be situated and analysed within a wider history of politics in relation to dance (4.8). Williamson (4.8) argues that overt or subtler explorations of restriction and disabling attitudes can only be explored within a field of Disability Arts. I argue, however, that the three works noted above demonstrate that there is a place in dance for work where artistry and political project can coincide.

#### **9.4 Three Case Studies: Three Careers**

The artists in the case study show artists at different stages of their careers each with very different pathways towards the positions they held in the field of UK theatre dance in 2012. There are, however, some commonalities that are revealed that relate directly to wider questions of training and career support for future disabled dance artists.

It is very clear that for all three other disabled artists have played a significant part in their development. With Bowditch it was not only the form of dance in the Candoco workshop but the presence of other disabled artists that contributed to her experiences and learning. This was also true of her fellow participants in the *Cultural Shift* programme and her collaborations with Brew as a more experienced choreographer and dance performer.

For Brew, Lunn, who draws on her own experiences as disabled and non-disabled dancer, offered both technical help and her own artistic practices to help him re-formulate his own practice. It is not only that Candoco existed as a company that offered him working experiences. It also gave him access to a working environment where he can share and explore practices and ideas in the company of other disabled dancers.

Brew in turn did not only contribute to the career development of disabled dance artists, for example in his engagement with the *Cultural Shift* programme at East London Dance (7.8). He also contributed to the development of non-disabled artists both in the co-mentoring programme but also with the dancers he engages for his company, Marc Brew Dance. In these activities we can see precisely the role for disabled artists in education in training that Verrent identifies (5.4).

Bowditch makes a strategic contribution to the development of opportunities for other disabled artists through her work as Dance Agent for Change and role within SDT. We can also see how her engagement at SDT impacted on the thinking and practices of non-disabled members of the company.

The *Unlimited* commissions awarded to all three artists placed an emphasis on collaborations between individual artists and existing companies, venues and arts organisations in order to develop the work of the disabled artists. This clearly provided a useful structure and provided them with a wealth of technical resources. What remains of interest is whether these collaborations, allowed for learning and development of both artists and partner as happened with the collaborations between SDT and Bowditch.

With Cunningham we can see the role played in her development by her access to the ideas and practices of other disabled activists and artists within and outside the field of disability arts (8.2). Robson as mentor and choreographer provided her both access to his own choreographic practice but also to an artistic practice he has formed over many years of working in the field of disability arts and across performance modalities (8.4).

In her encounters with Jess Curtis, Cunningham not only found an important resource and direction for her development as a performer but she also became an acknowledged and valuable resource for Curtis himself. In his Jess Curtis/Gravity projects and the involvement of Cunningham, David Toole and Kaz Langley as company members and collaborators, Curtis discovered a creative resource that fed his own choreographic explorations of the impermanency and the variation and capabilities of all bodies and his own practice-based research.

There are lacunae in their earlier trainings as exemplified in the experiences of both Cunningham and Bowditch. These are gaps that could have been addressed in the development of the kinds of accessible professional training discussed in 5.4. Equally they speak to a need for the development of pre-vocational experience for disabled artists within community arts and other youth training in dance. Again the gaps that relate to a critical register within which to discuss the work of disabled artists has relevance for developments both within the academy and within conservatoire training.

As artists they all bring skills developed in their various training performance arts as well as a professional rigor and discipline that stems from these trainings. With both Bowditch and Cunningham there is a particularly clear example of the skills associated directly with living and operating in fields as disabled people. These are what Bowditch terms 'informal skills' (6.2) that include management of time, projects, people, and communication skills directly relevant to leadership roles in dance. These informal skills can easily be overlooked in assessing the capacity of individual disabled students to engage with training or later career development opportunities.

The application of two analytic tools to all three case studies, Cameron's affirmative model of disability and Bourdieu's concept of habitus, raises other issues of potential application to training. As we can see in Cunningham's work in particular, an affirmative model of disability means shifting the meaning and value both of the body's capacity to move and the value of prior experience living in a disabling world. What is clear in the study of Cunningham's work and practice is that what is being dismantled and re-assembled, her bodily hexis, involves shifting meaning and movement in a process that can be highly emotional and also resistant to change.

Training can enable disabled, and indeed non-disabled students, to similarly dismantle a bodily hexis. It is a process that involves more than just taking the body to awkward and uncomfortable places, like that described by Brew. The process can place the student into one of deep engagement with emotions entangled within the habitus and bodily hexis. Successful negotiation of these powerful and, potentially puzzling and frightening emotions may eventually provide insight and a source for their future work.

## **9.5 Three Case Studies: Three Disabled Artists**

The multi-stranded model of inquiry proposed in 1.3 has proved a valuable model upon which to gather information on three artists taking into account their biographies, their own accounts of their personal trajectories and their work. The final crafting of the three individual case studies shows that they can guide the researcher towards the different ways in which they illuminate different aspects of the work and practices of three very different artists at different stages of their careers.

The approach bears some resemblance to other ways of tracing the influences of training, form and artistic preoccupations in the work and careers of individual artists. The model of inquiry can allow engagement not just with conscious or material factors, availability of grants, internships, form and technique but also with the more subtle ways in which encounters with others and other ideas may shape the possibilities for an artist.

Cameron's model allows consideration of how the taking on of a disabled identity as an artist have offered the three artists ways of using perceptions and capabilities of their bodies as valid and valuable resources for artistic expression. What Bourdieu offers to our understanding of their individual trajectories is that tastes, dispositions and the body itself may be shaped by social factors and values that lie below the limen of consciousness.

One area touched on in these studies that opens a fruitful area for further research is what might be seen as distinctive in the practices of each of these disabled choreographers compared with non-disabled choreographers. The studies reveal that each has and is developing distinctive practices in their work with other dancers.

Brew's use of tasks that place dancers in awkward and uncomfortable places and Bowditch's use of improvisation to find new possibilities for her dancers in *Leaving Limbo Landing* are informed by their individual experiences of entering or re-entering dance as disabled artists. Does it make a difference that their pathway to the method draws on their own experiences of entering or entering dance? The end method is, however, one is not dissimilar from those employed by a number of other non-disabled choreographers.

In Brew's encounters with the disabled artists in *Axis* we can see a kind of sensitivity and a distinctive style of making work that is recognised by the disabled artists. It is however, his engagement with Glennie as performer that raises questions about what he brings as disabled choreographer. We can see the potential for a shared habitus between these two performers when we look at their histories.

Both artists have bodily impairments acquired abruptly, Brew's paralysis and Glennie's deafness, and that suddenly change their bodies. Both artists Glennie as a child and Brew as an adult, have moved from one range of bodily experiences to another. Brew the dance artist recognised a distinctive and beautiful movement quality in Glennie's relationship to the instruments she plays that he incorporates into *Fusional Fragments* (7.7).

What Brew also seems to grasp is the potential for exploration of what Glennie describes as 'hearing as touch' and sensorial perceptions based on her impairment that are fundamental to her practice as a percussionist and creative artist. Glennie's accounts of her experiences offers an example of what Cunningham, in her WOW lecture, presented as an essential difference in the work of a disabled artists.

Cunningham claimed that 'it is that lived experience of disability that gives a disabled artist's work an original perspective. (WOW2013). It also illustrates an affirmative engagement with disability in Cameron's terms, as a variation not just to be celebrated but of considerable worth. Here I am suggesting that it is Brew's own lived experience of disability that plays an important part in his choreographic practice.

This thesis has shown that disability, in dance, as in other fields concerns attitudes, arrangements and structures that disable and put up barriers to participation. These are attitudes fed by imaginings around the perfect or ideal dancing body and illusions, that fly in the face of reality. Illusions that variations in bodily form and capabilities are neither normal nor to be expected. When used as an adjective, disability can also indicate shifts in artistic practices, and emergent fields of endeavour: disability arts, an emerging dance and disability sector and, disability politics.

The emergence of disabled dance artists who are developing choreographic practices is one such shift. Theatre dance is a very small field within the wider dance sector and dance remains a minority art form in relation to theatre or music. When disabled artists take up positions as dancers and choreographers in dance theatre and when these artists assume positive identities in which their impairments become valid and valued assets to be put to use. Then we can see the truth of Bourdieu's assertion that the habitus is shaped by the field of possibilities but can also shape those possibilities.

Disabled artists, by engaging with the art form, and struggling to find and to hold respected positions in the field of dance, can contribute to a restructuring

of that field. They can shift the possibilities in theatre dance not just for themselves but also for future disabled, and non-disabled dance artists.

The emergence of disabled dance artists who are developing choreographic practices is one such shift. Theatre dance is a very small field within the wider dance sector and dance remains a minority art form in relation to theatre or music. When disabled dancers and choreographers in dance theatre assume positive identities in which their impairments become valid and valued assets to be put to use, we can see that the 'habitus' is shaped by the 'field' of possibilities but can also shape those possibilities. Disabled artists, by engaging with the art form, and struggling to find and to hold respected positions in the field of dance, can contribute to restructuring that field. They can shift the possibilities in theatre dance not just for themselves but also for future disabled, and non-disabled dance artists.

## Appendix A. Selected Events<sup>113</sup> Relevant to Development of Dance and Disability Sector

### Selected Events: 1962-1990

|      |  |
|------|--|
| 1962 | First “ <i>Concert of Dance</i> ” at Judson Dance Theater.   |
| 1972 | June First performance by Steve Paxton identified as contact improvisation.<br><br>First Independent Living Centre established in Berkeley, Ca.<br><br>Formation of Independent Living Movement. |
| 1974 | Wheelchair Dancing Association formed.   |
| 1976 | Publication of ‘Fundamental Principles of Disability manifesto of Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS).<br><br>Fergus Early founds X6 Dance collective.                  |
| 1979 | Bethune Theater Dance Los Angeles, Ca. first outreach work.<br><br>Joint Forces Dance Company, Eugene, OH. formed by Alito Alessi.<br><br>Bilderwerfer , Vienna.                                 |
| 1980 | Amici Dance Company, London, formed by Wolfgang Strange.<br><br>Dancing Wheels Company, Cleveland, OH.   |

<sup>113</sup> Companies have been included only when date of foundation could be verified.



|      |   |
|------|---|
|      | Graeae Theatre Company formed by Nabil Shaban and Richard Tomlinson based in Aldershot.   |
| 1981 | United Nations Year of Disabled Persons.  |
| 1983 | Performance Troupe Taihen ,Osaka, formed by Manri Kim.  |
| 1985 | Counterbalance Integrated Dance Company, Dublin.  |
| 1986 | Foundation for Community Dance formed. Sue Ackroyd. Ken Bartlett et al.<br><br>Common Ground Sign Theatre , Liverpool.<br><br>Magpie Dance, London.<br><br>Touchdown Dance formed at Dartington by Steve Paxton and Anne Kilcoyne.  |
| 1987 | Axis Dance Company, Oakland,Ca., formed by Thais Mazur.<br><br>DanceAbility International, Eugene,OH.,formed by Alito Alessi.<br><br>Green Candle Dance Company, London, formed by Fergus Early.  |
| 1988 | Bill Shannon 'The Crutchmaster', performance artist.<br><br>First performance Brooklyn,NY.<br><br>Light Motion Dance Company, Seattle .Charlene Curtiss and JoAnne Petroff<br><br>Ability Unlimited, India. Repertory Company of Ability Unlimited Foundation formed by Syed Sallauddin . |

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 1990 | <p>Americans with Disabilities Act</p> <p>Paradox Dance Company, Oakland.Ca. formed by Bruce Curtiss.</p> <p>Opening of Dancing Wheels School, Cleveland, OH.</p> |
|------|---|

### **Selected Events: 1991 - 2012**

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 1991 | Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Act UK   |
| 1992 | Disability Discrimination Act UK  |
| 1993 | <p>Anjali Dance Company, Banbury.</p> <p>BBC establishes Disability Programmes Unit.</p>  |
| 1994 | <p>Blue Eyed Soul Dance Company, Shrewsbury.</p> <p>Sign Dance Collective, formed by Isolte Avila and David Bower.</p>  |
| 1995 | <p>Disability Discrimination Act UK</p> <p>Dance Detour, Chicago,IL., formed by Alana Wallace.</p> <p>Din A 13 Dance Company, Köln formed by Gerda König.</p> <p>Full Dance Radius, Atlanta. ( merger of E-motion and Dance Force).</p> |
| 1996 | Indepen-dance, Glasgow. Karen Anderson  |
| 1997 | <p>Touch Compass Dance , New Zealand.</p> <p>Igneous, Brisbane multimedia performance company formed by Jam</p>   |

|      |   |
|------|---|
|      | <p>Cunningham and Suzon Fuks.</p> <p>StopGAP ,Farnham UK , direction of Vicki Balaam.</p>   |
| 1998 | Tokounou Dance Company, South Africa.   |
| 1999 | <p>Agulhas Theatre Works, Johannesburg, South Africa, formed by Grace Agulhas.</p> <p>Asher Dance Eclectic , central Florida, sub-company of M.A.D.Theater Tampa FL.</p>  |
| 2000 | <p>Adugna Potentials, Ethiopia, formed by Adam Benjamin. Partnered with Adugna Community</p> <p>Dance Project, Royston Muldoon and Scottish Dance Theatre, Ethiopia Gemini Trust , Middlesex University.</p>  |
| 2002 | <p><i>Potential</i> Programme and newsletter dedicated to dance and disabled people .</p> <p>FRONTLINE Dance , Stoke on Trent, formed by Rachel Lines and Michael King</p> <p>Jolt Dance Company Christ Church , New Zealand</p> <p>Uhhuh Dance Company , Cardiff formed by Sarah Hall and Jon Luxton</p> |
| 2003 | Foot in Hand , Leicester formed by Louise Katerega.   |
| 2008 | Gimp Project ,new York directed by Heidi Latsky   |

|      |  |
|------|--|
| 2010 | Equality Act UK                                |
| 2012 | <i>Unlimited</i> Festival, South Bank, London. |

## Appendix B: Dance Works

### Dance Works: Caroline Bowditch

#### ***Tear 2005***

Choreographer: Caroline Bowditch

Choreographic mentor: Yael Flexer.

Dancer: Rachel Kay

#### ***This Too 2006***

Devised and performed by Caroline Bowditch and Fiona Wright

#### ***She Was Only A Knife Thrower's Assistant...2008***

Devised and performed by Caroline Bowditch and Fiona Wright

Costumes: Sarah Lowes

Lighting Advice: Jeanine Davies

#### ***Angels of Incidence 2007***

Choreographer: Adam Benjamin

Lighting Design: Adam Benjamin

Design Phyllis Byrne

Original Music JS Bach

Dancers: members of Scottish Dance Theatre Company

Guest Dancers: Caroline Bowditch, Michael King, Cornelia Kip-Lee and Daniel Daw.

*Commissioned by Scottish Dance Theatre*

*Phyllis*

*Byrne Original Beck*

### ***Proband 2008***

Devised and performed by Caroline Bowditch

Composer :Chris Benstead;

Glass artists : Lucy Broadhead and Bruce Tuckey; I

Lighting Designer: Darren Bird;

Set and Costume Designer :Ruth Raynor;

Costume Maker Sarah Lowes;

Set Builder Peter Ross

Text Advisor :Fiona Wright

Video filmed and edited by Becky Edmunds

### ***NQR 2010***

Choreographers; Janet Smith, Caroline Bowditch, Marc Brew

Voice over: Irene MacDougall

Designer: Naomi Wilkinson

Lighting Designer: Emma Jones

Composers: David Paul Jones and Robin Mason

Dancers: James MacGillivray, Toby Fitzgibbons, Jori Kerremans, Solène Weinachter, Joan Clevillé, Natalie Trewinnard, Matthew Robinson, Rocco Vermijs, Ruth Janssen, Caroline Bowditch and Marc Brew.

### ***The Long and the Short of It 2008***

Choreographed and performed by: Caroline Bowditch and Tom Pritchard

Lighting Designer: Emma Jones

Music Rising Appalachia

Dancers for 2011: Caroline Bowditch and Joan Clevillé

For Dada Fest 2010

### ***Leftovers 2010***

Devised and performed by Caroline Bowditch and Marc Brew

### ***Leaving Limbo Landing 2012***

Artistic Team:

Artistic Director and Choreographer: Caroline Bowditch

Composer: Chris Benstead

Performers : Sarah Blanc ( Rehearsal Director), Mona McCarthy ( Aerial Advisor) Naomi Murray, Gabby Rose and Indra Slovena,

Costume Designer : Abby Grewcock

Assistant Director: Rachel Kay

Set Designer and production Manager: Jayne Quinton ( Frank productions)

Artistic Mentors: Simone Kenyon and Judith Doherty

Access Advisors: Bridget Crowley, Deepa Shastri and Julie Hornsby

Installation/Exhibition at South Bank Centre

Sound Artist: Dan Gale Hayes

Photographer: Carl Cordonnier

Exhibition subjects: Patricia Horsby, Tony Adigun, Rebecca Cromwell, Barbara Bearsley, Colin Young, Kuntal Indulkar, Siegfried Ip, Julian Bridge man, Sharleen Fulgence, Daniel Limbaya, Andy Black and Muhin Latifi.

Production Team:

Production Manager; Jayne Quinton

Tour Production Manager: Alan Jackson ( CN Events)

Stage and Tour Manager: Claire Eve

Creative producer; Polly Risbridger (East London Dance)

## **Dance Works: Marc Brew**

At CandoCo:

### ***Microphobia 2003***

Choreographers : Luca Silvestrini & Bettina Strickler of Protein Dance

Dancers: Marc Brew, Bettina Carpi, Jamieson Dryburgh, David Lock, Pedro Machado, and Stine Nilsen.

### ***Human Suite 2003***

Choreographer: Stephen Petronio

Dancers: Marc Brew, Bettina Carpi, Jamieson Dryburgh, David Lock, Pedro Machado, Stine Nilsen, and Chisato Minaminura.

### ***The Journey 2005***

Choreographer: Fin Walker

Dancers: Marc Brew, Bettina Carpi, Vicky Fox, Pedro Machado, Chisato Minamimura, Stine Nilsen, and James O'Shea

### ***In Praise of Folly 2005***

Choreographer: Athina Vahla

Dancers: Marc Brew, Bettina Carpi, Vicky Fox, Pedro Machado, Chisato Minamimura, Stine Nilsen, and James O'Shea

***And Who Shall Go to the Ball? 2007***

Choreographer: Rafael Bonachela

Dancers ; Bettina Carpi, Natalie Ayton, Marc Brew, Jorge Crecis, Freddie Opoku Addaie, Nadia Adame Rojas, and Zoe Brown

***The Stepfather 2007***

Choreographer: Arthur Pita

Dancers: Bettina Carpi, Natalie Ayton, Marc Brew, Jorge Crecis, Freddie Opoku-Addaie, Nadia Adame Rojas, and Zoe Brown

***Parallel Lines 2012***

Choreographer: Marc Brew

Dancers : Dancers: Darren Anderson, Elinor Baker, Dan Daw, Mirjam Gurtner, Annie Hanauer, Victoria Malin, Chris Owen, Welly O'Brien, Edu O., Maggie Ho Ki Kwan, Mickaella Dantas, (Ronny) Ming Hei Wong

Costume Designer : Jo Paul

Set designer: Sam Collins

Lighting designer : Ben Pacey

**At SDT*****NQR 2010***

Developed for Dada Fest 2010

Choreographers; Janet Smith, Caroline Bowditch, Marc Brew

Voice over: Irene MacDougall

Designer: Naomi Wilkinson

Lighting Designer: Emma Jones

Composers: David Paul Jones and Robin Mason



Dancers: James MacGillivray, Toby Fitzgibbons, Jori Kerremans, Solène Weinachter, Joan Clevillé, Natalie Trewinnard, Matthew Robinson, Rocco Vermijs, Ruth Janssen, Caroline Bowditch and Marc Brew.

### ***Leftovers 2010***

Devised and performed by Caroline Bowditch and Marc Brew

As Marc Brew / Mark Brew Dance Company

### ***Nocturne 2008/2009***

Choreographer: Marc Brew

Dancers: Marc Brew, Graham Adey, Daniela Larsen, Tilly Webber

Cello soloist: Luke Moore

Designer/Dramaturg: Luke Pell

Composer: Gary Lloyd

Text : Luke Pell spoken by Iain Banks.

### ***Remember When 2008***

Choreographed and performed by Mark Brew

With Axis Dance Company

### ***Full of Words 2011***

Choreographer: Marc Brew

Dancers :Rodney Bell, Sonsherée Giles, Sebastian Grubb, Julia Monin and Alice Sheppard

With Velcro Dance Company

### ***Feast 2012***

Direction/Choreography: Marc Brew

Dancers: Hannah DeCancho, Ollie Ellis, Stephanie Holt, Frank McDaniels, Kim Noble, and Jack Mullins

Costume Designer: Corinne Hockley

Lighting Designer: Neil Smith

***Fusional Fragments 2012***

Director/choreographer: Marc Brew, Phillip Sheppard,

Music: Dame Evelyn Glennie

Dancers/ Performers: Avatara Ayuso, Rebecca Evans, James Cousins, Dame Evelyn Glennie, Davin King, and Benny Ord

Lighting Designer: Andy Hamer

## **Dance Works: Claire Cunningham**

With Gary Robson

### ***Sputnik: A Project of Possibilities 2008***

Director: Gary Robson

Aerial choreography: Mish Weaver

Kinetic sculpture: Eduard Bersudsky of Sharmanka),

Music: Leigh Sterling

Dance/aerial performance: Claire Cunningham

With Blue Eyed Soul Dance Company

### ***Touch/Don't Touch 2005***

Director/Choreographer Jess Curtis

Performers: Claire Cunningham and C. Derrick Jones

### ***Catch 2005***

Director: Jess Curtis

Performers: Claire Cunningham, Rachel Freeman Victoria Malin, Kate Mason, and Tanya Scully

With Jess Curtis/Gravity

### ***Under the Radar 2006***

Director: Jess Curtis

Performers: Ulrike Bodaumer, Claire Cunningham, Matthias Herrman, Kaz Langley, Jess Curtis, Jörg Müller, and Maria Francesca Scaroni,

Dramaturg: Gabi Beler

***Dances for Non/fictional Bodies 2010***

Conceived and Directed by: Jess Curtis

Created and Performed by: Claire Cunningham, Jörg Müller, Maria Francesca Scaroni, David Toole and Jess Curtis.

Original Score by: Matthias Herman

Dramaturge/Provocateur: Guillermo Gomez-Peña

***Mobile 2008***

Created and conceived by Claire Cunningham In collaboration with:

Jess Curtis (Choreographic Interventions),

Davey Anderson (Text Development),

Jonathan Campbell (Aerial Design), Matthias Herrmann (Music),

Mish Weaver (Aerial Choreography),

Emily Leap (Aerial Coach),

Jennie Loof (Costume),

Nigel Dunn (Sound Editing)

Dancer: Claire Cunningham

***Evolution 2007***

Co-production with Claire Cunningham and JessCurtis/Gravity

Dancer: Claire Cunningham

Choreographer and performer: Claire Cunningham

With National Theatre of Scotland

## ***Ménage À Trois 2012***

Co-created by Claire Cunningham and Gail Sneddon in partnership with National Theatre of Scotland.

Dancers: Claire Cunningham and Christopher Owen

Composer: Matthias Herrmann

Designer Rachana Jadhav

Lighting Designer Karsten Tinapp

Costume Designer Kevin Pollard

Puppet Consultant Steve Tiplady

Dramaturg Davey Anderson

## **12**

Concept & Direction: Claire Cunningham

Assistant Director and Mentor: Gail Sneddon

All material created by the performers

Dancers: Darren Anderson, Elinor Baker, Dan Daw, Mirjam Gurtner, Annie Hanauer, Victoria Malin, Chris Owen, Welly O'Brien, Edu O., Maggie Ho Ki Kwan, Mickaella Dantas, (Ronny) Ming Hei Wong

Costume Design: Shanti Freed

Composer: Matthias Herrmann

Lighting Design: Karsten Tinapp

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